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EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS

22 GAME REVIEWS

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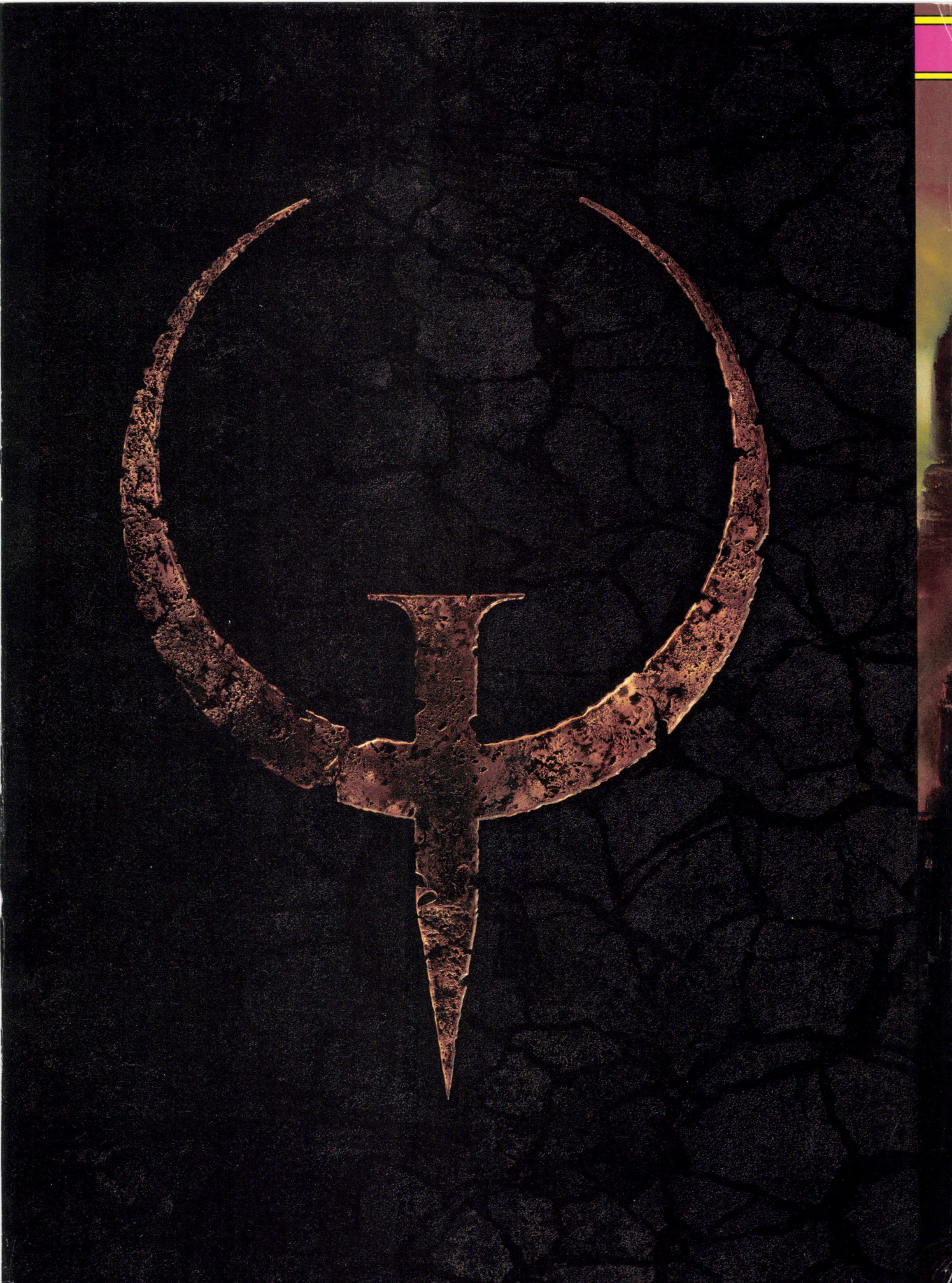
— BOOT MAGAZINE

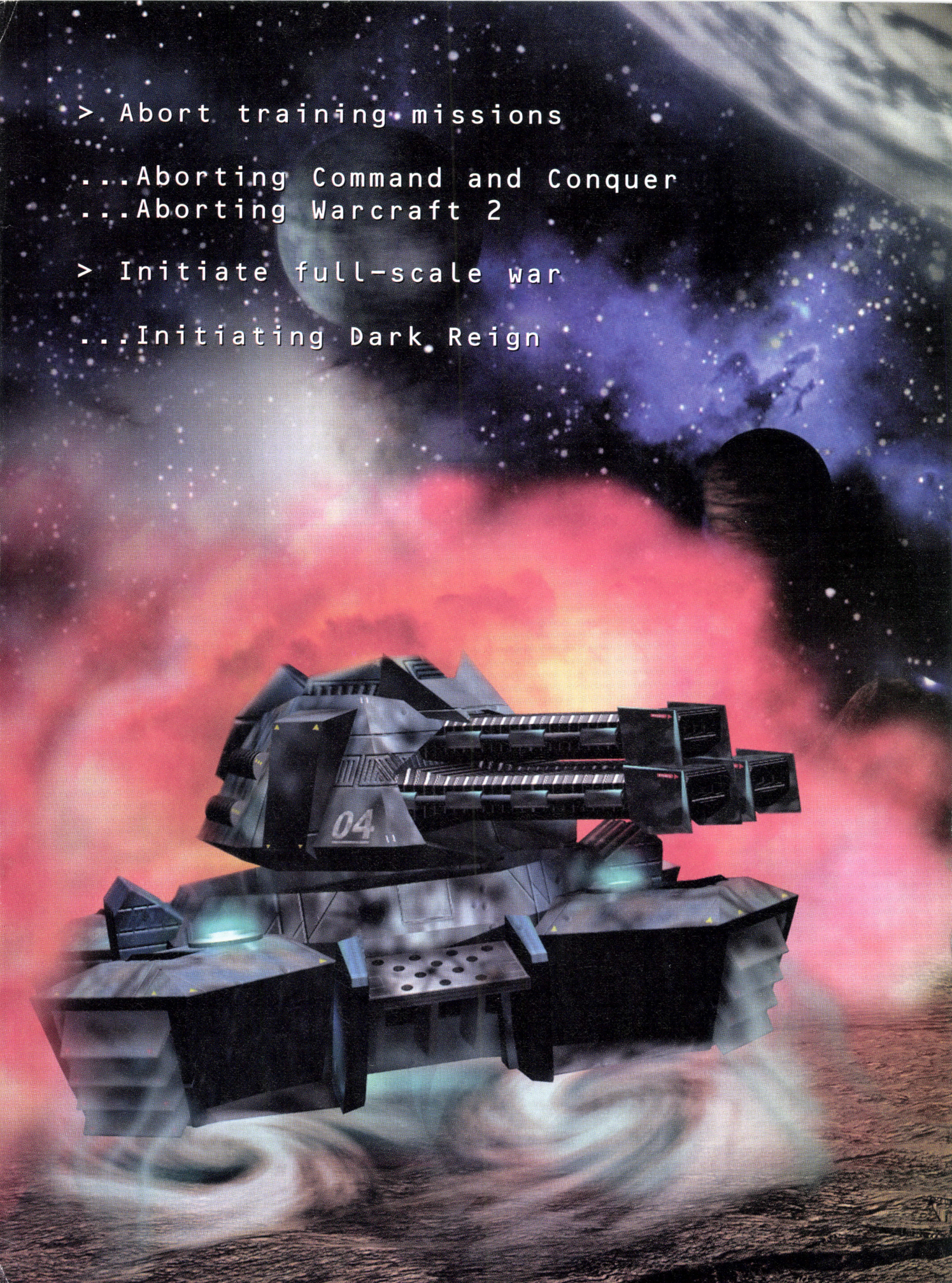
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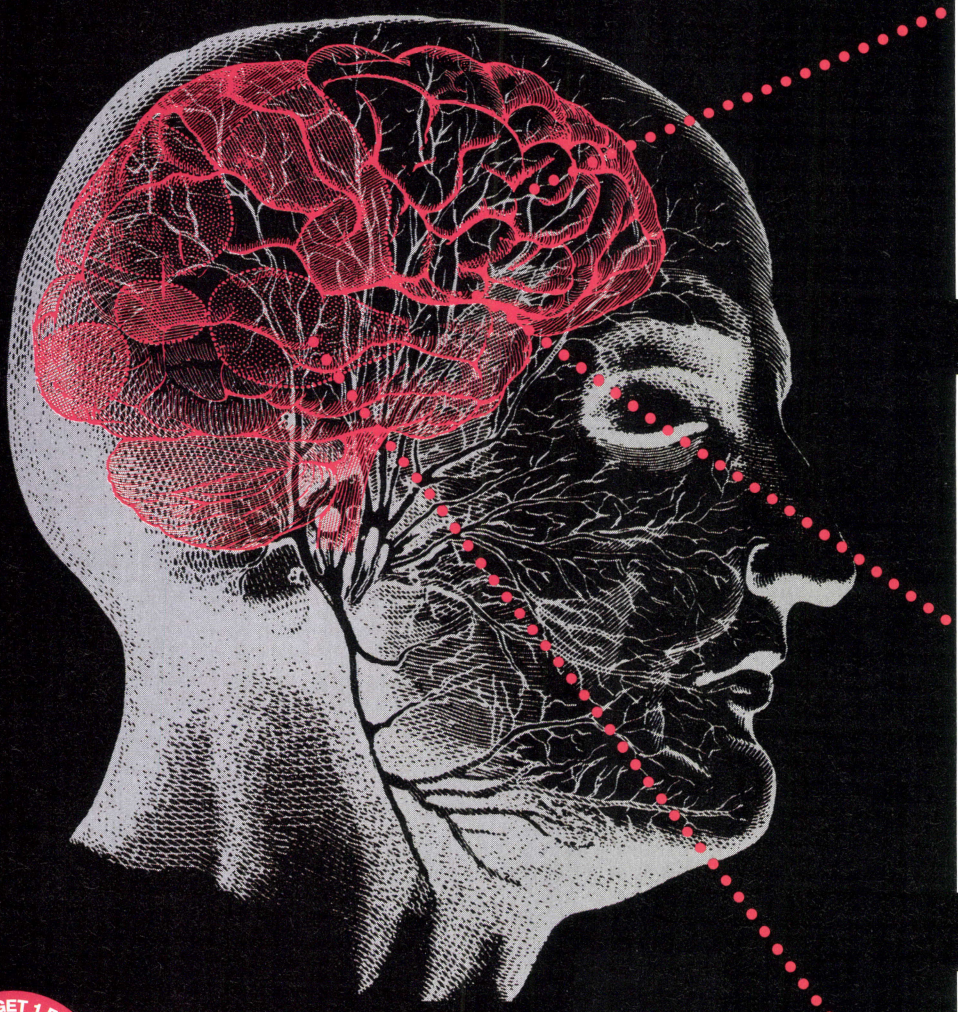
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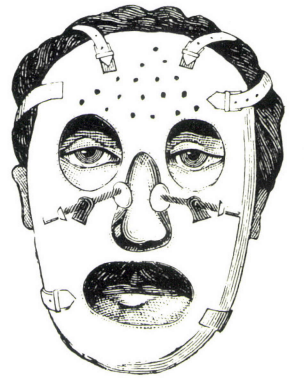
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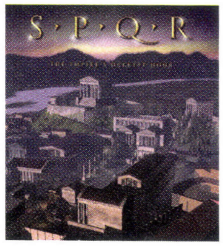
Delusions of inflation of worth, power, knowledge, identity or special relationship to a deity or famous person. (e.g., all powerful sorceress, assassins, ancient Romans, commanders of inter-galactic space ships)



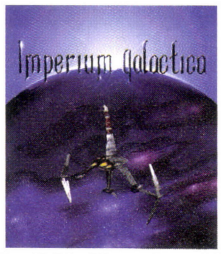
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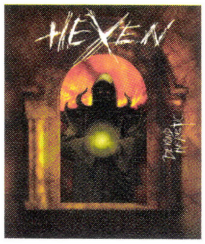
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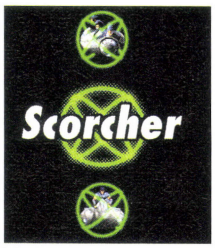
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A pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others. Elaborate weaponry is often involved.



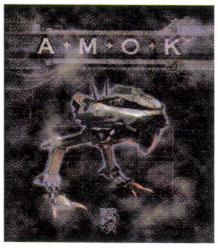
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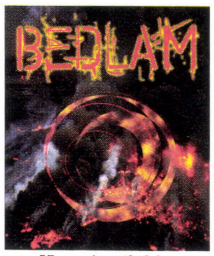
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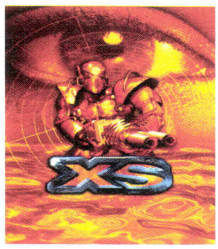
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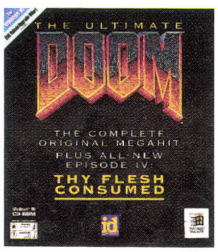
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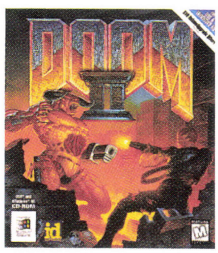
Repetitive behaviors or mental acts (e.g., performing magic, killing) that the person feels driven to perform in response to an obsession.



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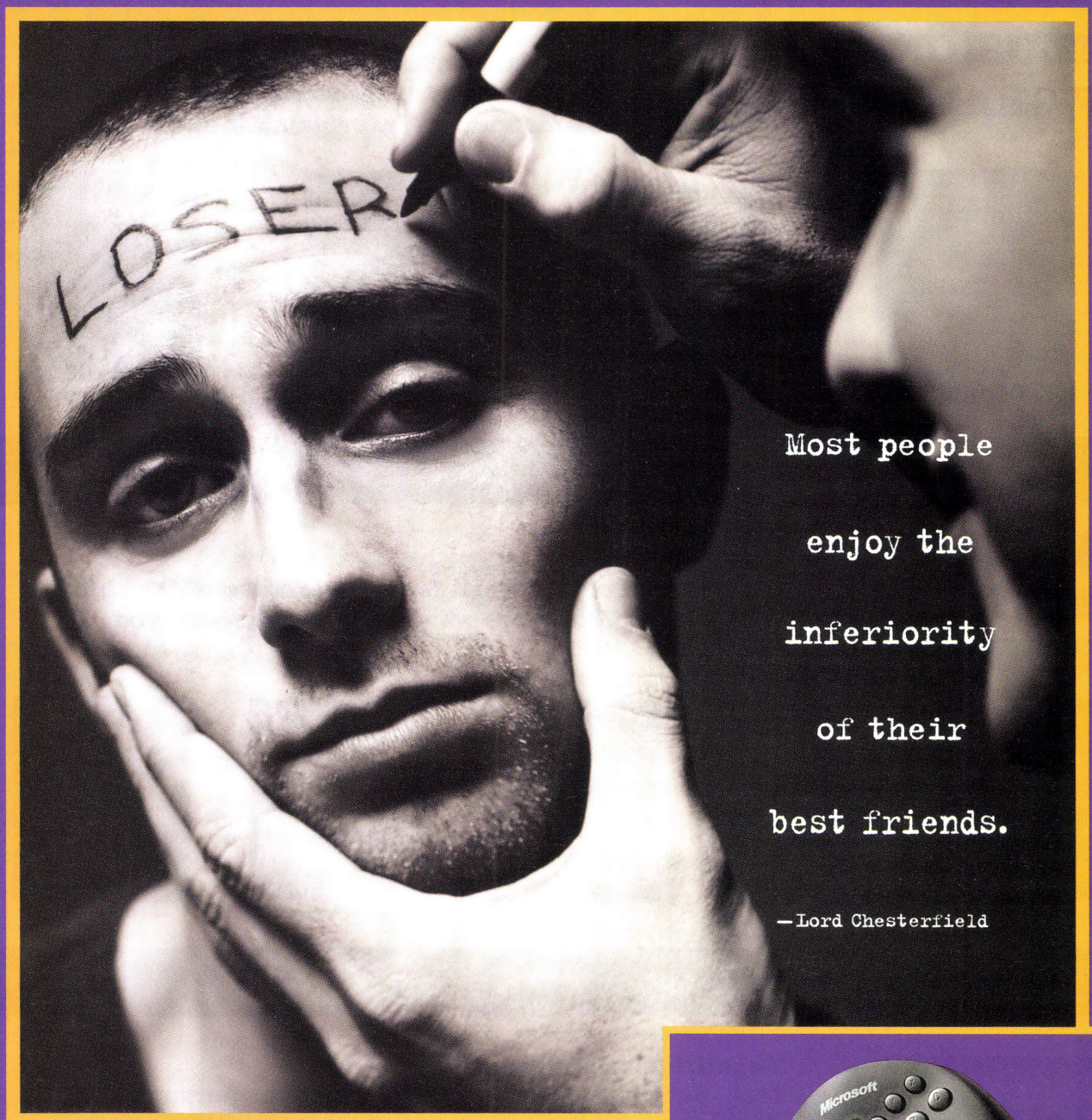


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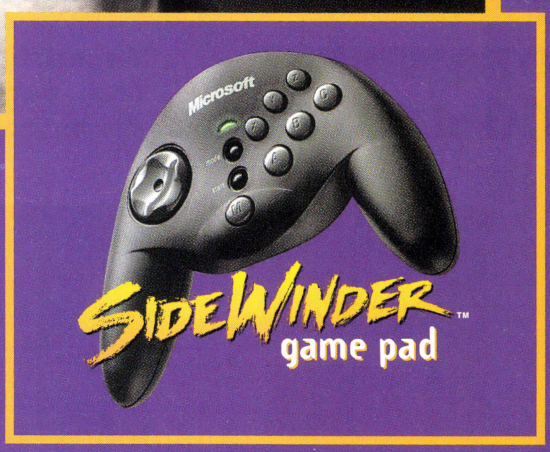
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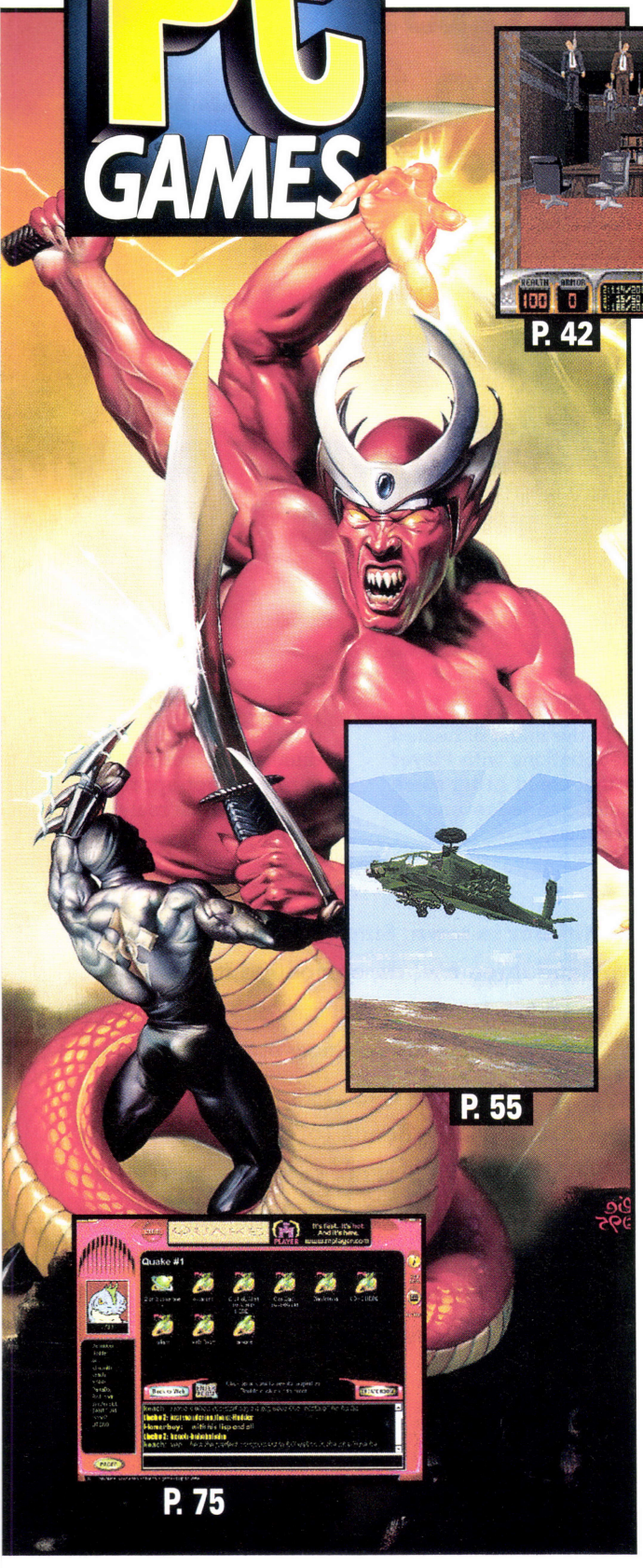


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JANUARY 1997
VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

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42 Into the Realms of 3D
By Rob Smith

"Hey, 3D Realms, you just leveled Los Angeles. Now waddaya gonna do?" Hint: They're not going to a California theme park. Preview the eerie Shadow Warrior and get an insider's look at the incredible new games coming from the Dukes of Nukem.

BEST OF 1996

55 The 4th Annual *PC Games* Editors' Choice Awards
Edited By Daniel Morris

While you were up late blasting through Quake, we were nukin' it out with Duke. When you got joystick wrist, we got gamepad cramp. Just like you, we played lots of games in 1996. But unlike you, we got paid for it. To show we earned it, here's our annual pick for the best games of the year.

ONLINE GAMING

75 GAMING OVER THE INTERNET
By Jason D'Aprile

Multiplayer action games playable through TEN, Mplayer, Engage, and Kali ensure there will be plenty of Red Asphalt on the Information Highway. But who has the best on-ramp? We notch a few holes in the global village and share our conclusions on how today's Internet game services stack up.

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The world's most popular simulation finally gets some competition.

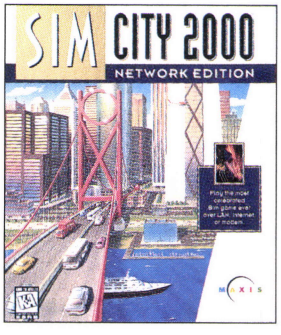


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Player 2
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Player 4
checks out the new stadium and power plant he shrewdly got approved at the city's last real-time town meeting.



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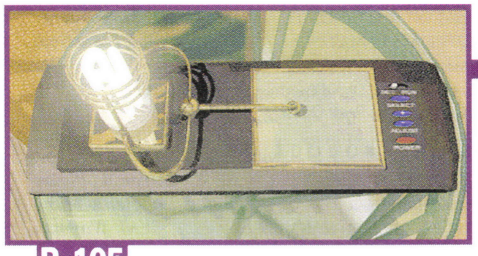
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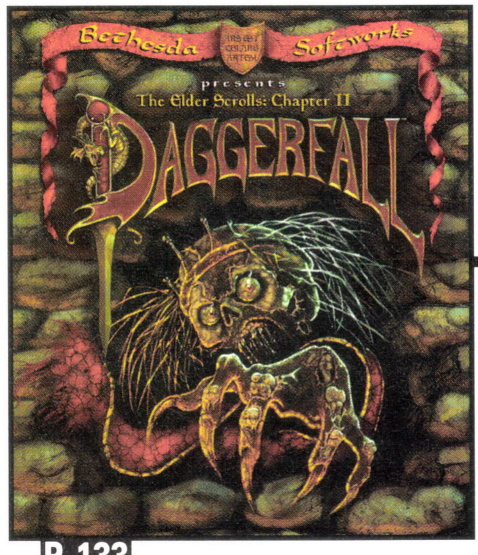
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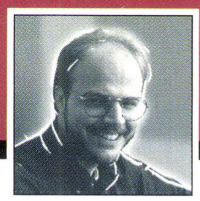
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EDITOR'S NOTE



STEVE KLETT

New Year, New Look

Many people see the end of the year as a time for turning over a new leaf, and we at *PC Games* are no exception, as we've turned over several in this issue. We've listened to you, and, as a result, *PC Games* just keeps getting better as we strive to continue giving you more of what you want—gaming information.

We've kicked off several things with this issue, beginning with a more stylish, friendly, and—most of all—fun redesign of the book. No, we didn't move everything around on you, but we did change a few section names (Tech Shop is now Technobabble, for example). Hopefully you'll find the book even easier to navigate, read, and enjoy than ever before. Check it out and let us know what you think!

But that's just the window dressing. You'll also notice a much more aggressive coverage of multiplayer and online gaming in this issue, starting with Jason D'Aprile's feature, "Gaming on the Internet," on page 75. With TEN and Mplayer going commercial, the time is right to start taking a good hard look at the online services, as they're now making you pay to play. It's clear that 1997 is going to be a definitive year for online gaming, and we'll be right there in the thick of things to tell you where your online gaming dollar is best spent. Yes, it's a dirty job, but we're glad to do it.

We've also added an online games department to our reviews section (see page 111 for a review of 3DO's Meridian 59), and incorporated a separate score judging the multiplayer appeal of games that offer this option. We did this to more accurately rate games such as Command & Conquer, Quake, and Duke, which, for many, excel in multiplayer mode but leave much to be desired in stand-alone play. We've also separated the multiplayer score in our ratings box to show you at a glance if a game has multiplayer capabilities and just how much fun it is to play.

Of course, we will still continue to bring you tons of behind-the-scenes looks at the hottest games in development. This month, you need look no further than our cover story, which brings you the skinny on Shadow Warrior—the latest brainchild from those warped but oh-so-clever minds at 3D Realms. We hopped a flight down to Garland, Texas, for an exclusive hands-on look at what appears to be yet another gameplay advance for first-person action games. Turn to senior reviews editor Rob Smith's story on page 42 and start drooling over the deathmatch possibilities.

This is just the beginning of the first-class coverage that'll take you through '97. We hope you like the changes, as we're worked hard to give you more of what you want. Keep the feedback coming!

Steve Klett

Steve Klett
Editor
Internet: sklett@pcgames.com
AOL: steveklett

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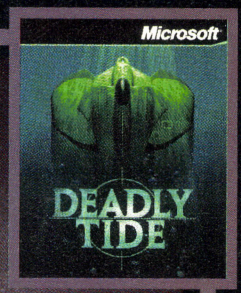
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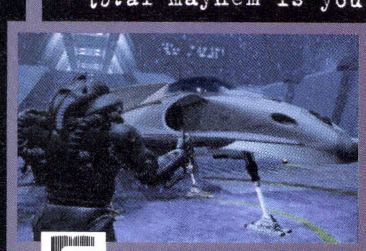
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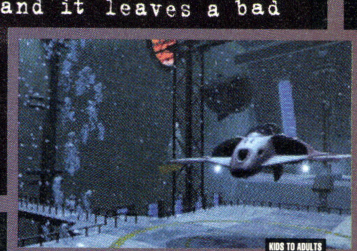


Tokyo, A.D. 2500.

Beirut, A.D. 2500.

Earth covered in plankton is only the start. *Alien* invaders have plunged to the ocean floor on a mission to submerge Earth. And the only lifeguard on hand to prevent total mayhem is you. Earth's last chance to keep 6 billion heads above water in DEADLY TIDE™. You are a solitary soldier in an underwater craft, driven on by a powerful musical score and state-of-the art graphics. You have to plan a strategy amid a relentless alien threat, if you are to succeed. The water is salty and it leaves a bad taste in your mouth, then again so will defeat. The mission is simple, don't let the Earth drown.





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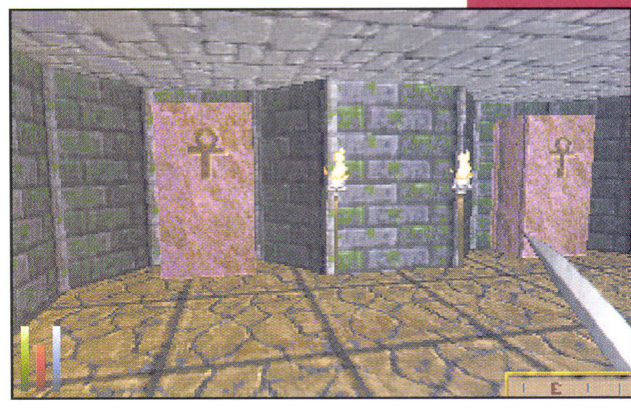
KIDS TO ADULTS K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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PC GAMES.EXE

DEMO OF THE MONTH
The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

Explore a huge, fully playable world in Bethesda's role-playing classic. We're talking an entire island here, so set aside a few hours to take in the sights, interact with the characters, and undertake a few missions.



Due to last-minute technical problems, the Scorched Planet demo advertised on the CD card had to be dropped. We will endeavor to put the demo on a future CD as soon as possible.

21 HOT DEMOS

Demo of the Month
The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall (Bethesda)

Action Games
Hunter Hunted (Sierra)

Adventure Games
Ecstatica 2 (Psygnosis)
A Fork in the Tale (AnyRiver Entertainment)

Fly & Drive Games
Rocket Jockey (Rocket Science)

Simulation Games
Pinball Builder (21st Century Entertainment)
3D Ultra Pinball 2: Creep Night (Sierra)

Sports Games
NBA Full Court Press (Microsoft)
NFL Quarterback Club '97 (Acclaim)
Microsoft Soccer (Microsoft)
Front Page Sports: Trophy Bass 2 (Sierra)

Strategy Games
Admiral Sea Battles (Megamedia)
Baku Baku (Segasoft)
Steel Panthers 2: Modern Battles (SSI)

Online Services
TEN: including Duke Nukem 3D, Necrodome, Warcraft shareware, C&C enabler
Mplayer: Terminal Velocity (and enabler), Warcraft shareware, C&C enabler, Quake enabler
AOL: 50 free hours trial software

Utilities
SciTech Disk Doctor 5.3

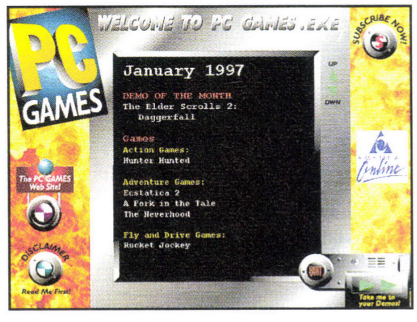
Getting Started

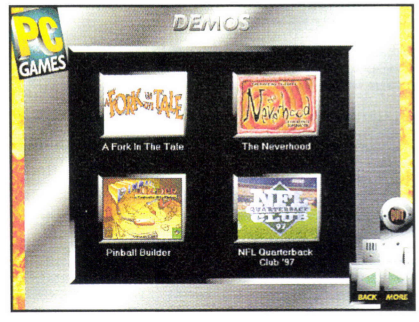
Win 95

1. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
2. After a few seconds the disc should autoplay. If it doesn't, use Windows Explorer to find the *pcgames.exe* file on the CD and double-click to run.

Win 3.1

1. Start Windows.
2. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
3. Select Run from the Program Manager's File menu.
4. Type "d:\setup.exe" in the Command Line box and press Enter.





Getting Around

Take a gander at the list of hot demos on the Welcome screen. From this first screen, you can also sign up for 50 hours of free connect time on AOL. When you're ready to play the games, click on the arrow in the bottom-right corner.

First up will be the option to play our Demo of the Month: Daggerfall. Click on the large screen shot to get straight to the details on how to get up and running. Scroll through the other pages to uncover the buttons leading to our 20 other great games.

In Case of Emergency

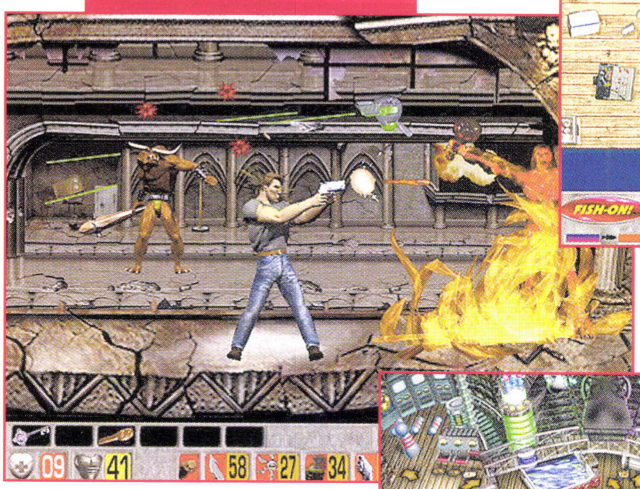
The impulses of PCs mean that you may occasionally run into difficulties. Here's how to access the demos manually if, for some reason, the interface fails to run: Open My Computer. Right-click on the PC Games CD logo and click Open. All the game directories will be displayed. Double-click on the game you want to play and locate the *readme* file for that game. Double-click to open it and read the installation instructions.

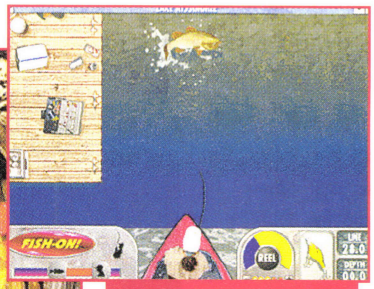
Most games have a *setup.exe* or *install.exe* file that configures the game for your machine. Follow the instructions to get optimum performance (e.g., rebooting in MS-DOS mode to get the best out of the DOS-based games).

If you're still having problems, consult the help files at our Web site, **www.pcgames.com**, or e-mail technical support questions not addressed in the files to *ctou@pcgames.com*.

PC GAMES.EXE

Hunter Hunted





FPS: Trophy Bass 2



3D Ultra Pinball: Creep Night

Steel Panthers 2: Modern Battles





The Neverhood

OFFICIAL CONTEST RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR TEN CONTEST

1. No Purchase Necessary. No purchase or payment of any money is necessary to enter. To enter the sweepstakes, print your name and address (including your city, state, and zip code) on a card and mail it to: Total Entertainment Network Contest, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404. Enter as often as you like, but each entry must be mailed separately. All entries must be handwritten. Mechanically reproduced entries will not be accepted. Entries must be postmarked by January 24, 1997. Entries will not be returned. The sponsor and PC Games Publishing, Inc., assume no responsibility for lost, mutilated, late, or misdirected entries.

2. Prizes. Total Entertainment Network Contest prizes and, grand prize will be awarded. Grand prize is valued at less than $500. The aggregate retail value of all prizes is less than $5,000 US dollars. Winners will be determined at a drawing to be held on January 30, 1997. All prizes will be awarded. Prize winners will be notified by mail by February 28, 1997. To claim your prize, send your winning game piece to Total Entertainment Network Contest, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd, Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404.

3. Odds of Winning. Odds of winning depend upon the number of qualified entries received.

4. Eligibility. Sweepstakes are open to residents of the United States. However, for entrants under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must be designated the winner if the entrant is selected and prizes will be awarded to a parent or guardian in trust for that minor. Citizens of Canada are excluded from participation and receiving any prizes from the sweepstakes. Employees of PC Games Publishing, Inc., and/or Total Entertainment Network, their subsidiaries, affiliates, advertising agencies and immediate families are not eligible for prizes. No more than one prize will be awarded to any entrant.

5. Requirements and Responsibility of Winners. Winners will be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility and a publicity release that will allow the use of winners' names and likenesses for other promotional activities by the sponsor and/or Infotainment World, Inc. All federal, state and local taxes are the responsibility of winners.

6. Winners List. For a list of winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Total Entertainment Network Contest, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd, Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404. Requests for winners lists must be received by March 15, 1997. Allow 4 weeks for delivery of winners list.

7. Record Keeping. A list of the winners will be kept for at least two years.

8. Disclaimer. This contest is void where prohibited.

9. Liabilities. This sweepstakes/contest is sponsored by PC Games Publishing, Inc., and Total Entertainment Network, which are together solely responsible for its conduct, completion and awarding of prizes. All decisions of PC Games Publishing, Inc., and Total Entertainment Network on all matters relating to the promotion are final. PC Games Publishing, Inc., and Total Entertainment Network reserve the right to cancel or modify the contest in whole or in part. PC Games Publishing, Inc., and participating sponsors assume no liability resulting from the use of the prizes. By accepting the prize, each winner for themselves and their families indemnifies and holds harmless PC Games Publishing, Inc., and participating sponsors from and against any liabilities in any way relating to the acceptance or use of the prize awarded or travel related to the sweepstakes or prizes. Additional releases may be required for the prize winner. Submission of an entry is acknowledgment of and agreement to be bound by all terms and conditions of this contest. VOID IN WHOLE OR IN PART WHERE PROHIBITED BY LAW.

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The Battlezone

More and more, the hottest action in gaming is head to head—blowing away your friends, neighbors, or a complete stranger 3,000 miles away. We live to play this way, too, and now *PC Games* is the place to go for all the info you want on the exploding MPG and online scenes. Go to The Battle Zone, and we'll fill you in on what the hottest new multiplayer games are and give you the newest levels to download. This is where you'll find the Quake Epicenter, the Nukem Files, and more. We'll also bring you the latest news from the new online gaming services such as Mplayer, TEN, and DWANGO. And we'll keep tabs on the big online services, too. Check out **www.pcgames.com/zone** for all your multiplayer needs—before your opponent does!

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The key to winning is often that one little strategy or tip that isn't readily apparent in the heat of battle. So let *PC Games* tell you how to take out that pesky monster, dogged Spitfire, or demon from the depths! Sign up for the PC Games Tip of the Day, and we'll e-mail you a gaming tip every weekday that should help you negotiate the maze in that one game that's really killing you. Each week, we feature a different game. Just point your browser to **www.tipworld.com/games/**, fill out the form, and we'll do the rest.

PC Games on CompuServe

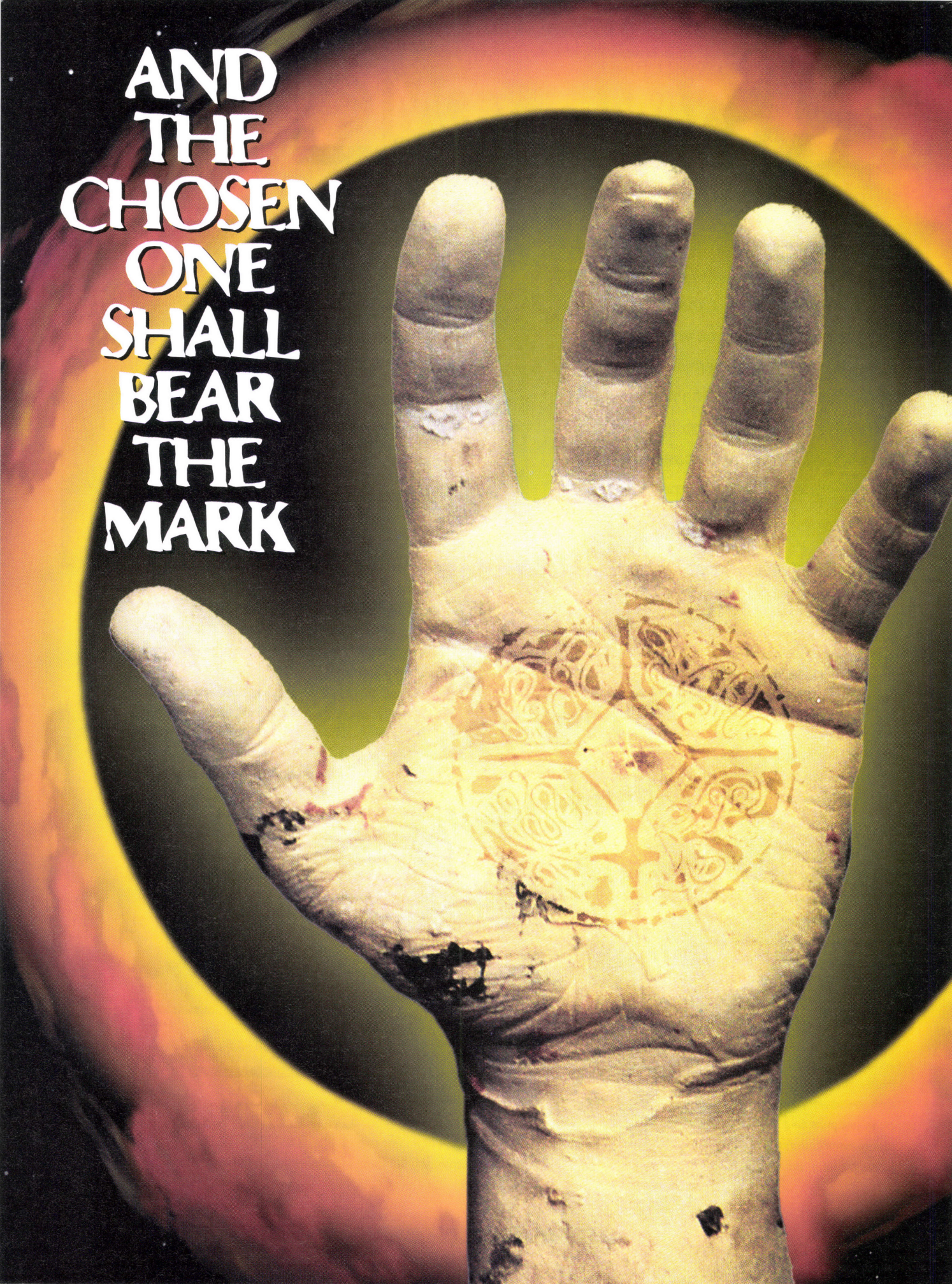
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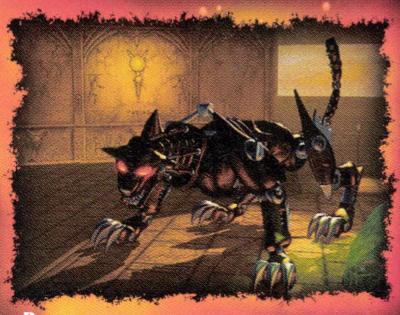

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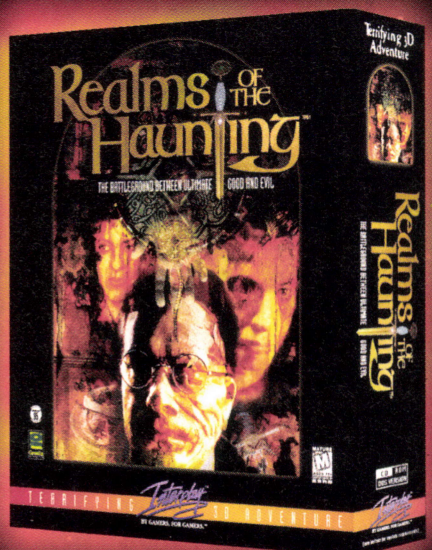


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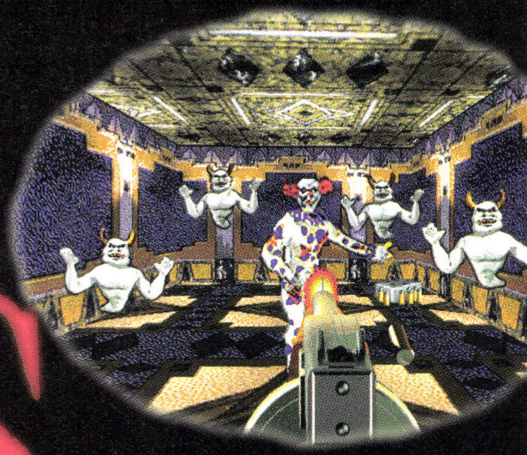
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SOME GAMES ARE TOUGH.



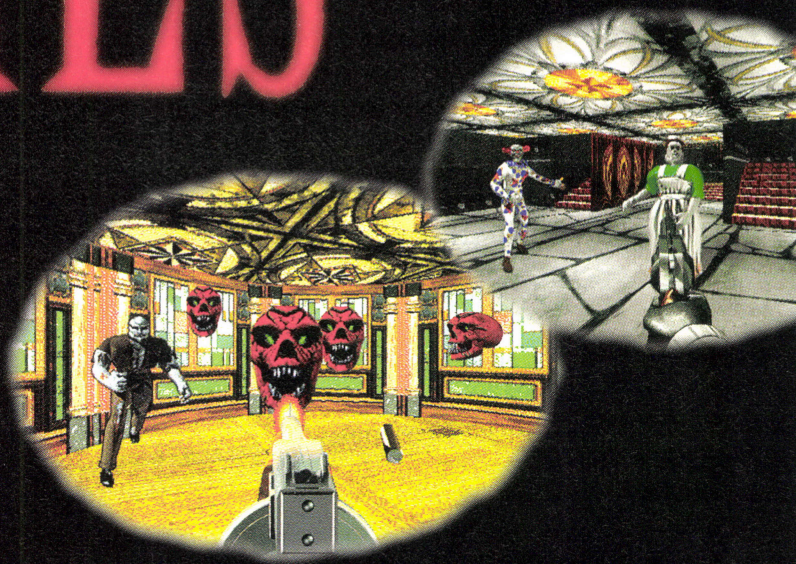
paranormal puzzles

A sophisticated shooter laced with dark humor, Killing Time™ is a fright-fest for the true aficionado

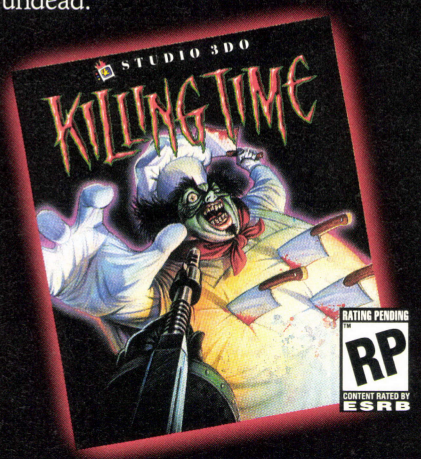


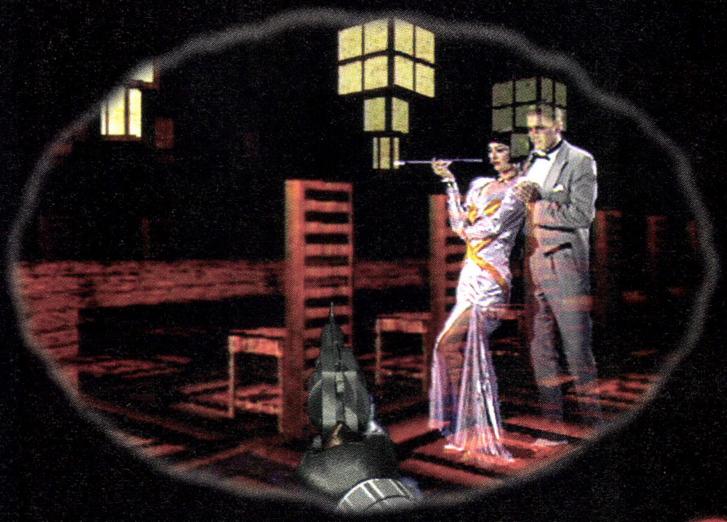
gallows humor

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supernatural storyline

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INCOMING!

Question of the Month: Who'd We Miss?

You've read our 1996 Editors' Choice Awards; now it's time to choose your own. Invent a new category, one we didn't do—good or bad, main or Murphy—and tell us what game would win, and why. Argue your point and be creative: the person who sends us the best response will get a free, always-cool *PC Games* T-shirt. (Okay, okay, and a game of our choosing.) As always, write to us at *PC Games*, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94402; fax us at 415-349-7482; or e-mail us at pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

Judging from the responses to November's Question of the Month (Female Protagonists?), it seems that women main characters are a welcome addition to the gaming world. Most of you thought gender was a non-issue—that gameplay, not who you're playing, was much more important. A few of you, on the other hand, were more outspoken:

Well, personally, I think having women as the main character in video games is quite stupid. Most video games are based on ideas from movies, and about 90 percent of all movies feature men as the main characters. Action movies are the biggest blockbusters for many reasons. There's blood, gore, and nudity. All three of these make up a great movie. Whether it's Stallone firing some heavy weapons or Van Damme kicking some butt, people will pay lots to see a movie like that. Now, I'm not sexist, but while women in video games is okay to a certain extent, game programmers should focus on what makes more income: men!

Wilson Savoy
Eunice, LA

I think it's about time there are more female protagonists in games! I love computer games. I play them all the time. I love action films, too, especially ones with tough, sexy, FEMALE protagonists. There are not many (if any!) games, especially action games, targeted at women. Sure, I played Myst, but my favorites would have to be Quake, Crusader: No Regret, and WarCraft II. I can hardly wait for Diablo.

Of course, if I want to play a female character, I have to be the "rogue," even though I'd rather be the fighter. Games with females as the lead or with equal character interaction are a great way to get the men and women that play games into a mindset that women can be powerful and smart...and as deadly as any man.

Playing a female character, I relate to the game better when I see my character or get responses with feminine pronouns from NPCs. I love Warcraft II, but I'm getting a little tired of "Yes, my Lord" this and "Yes, sir" that. Not to mention Alleria telling me, "You don't touch the other elves that way." Excuse me?

As far as influencing my purchases, when it comes time to slap my money down, it doesn't matter if the lead character is male, female, or cockroach. What matters is gameplay. If it's not fun, I'm not buying.

The industry needs to get to the point of letting you choose the sex of your character as a matter of course, especially in multiplayer games. If I'm going to go kick some butt on the Internet, I want them to know it's one bad-ass FEMALE doing the kickin'!

Laura Straub
Via the Internet

I Love You, Man

I just got your November CD, and I loved it!

I love the fact that you put Leisure Suit Larry on your disc. I usually buy other magazines, but now that I've tried yours, I find that I have been wasting my time. They would never have put a game like that on their disc.

Now I'm thinking of subscribing to your magazine, because that's the kind of stuff I want to see on a CD: a sense of humor and beautiful women.

I would like to know if stuff like Larry is always on your CD or if it's a once-in-a-blue-moon type of thing. If it's typical, I'm going to subscribe. Your magazine's a lot better than the others, but is it always that way? Please let me know your standards.

James A. Sherman
Via the Internet

Glad you liked the demo, James. Now, about the "standards" question: We've got a simple, die-by policy for both the disc and the magazine—cover the newest, coolest games as quickly and thoroughly as we can. That's all there is to it. The Larry titles are part of one of the longest-running series in gaming; there's no way we could pass up the opportunity to show the latest one to our readers. Now, does that mean each month's disc will be full of disco lotharios and half-naked women? Not necessarily. But we'll keep going after the best game-playing experiences month after month, and we won't shy away from a great demo just because it contains a little questionable content. Ours is not to reason why... —*Ed.*

What Evil Lurks...

I've heard a lot of good things about the PlayStation game Resident Evil. Is it going to come out for the PC? If so, when?

Adam Koebel
Via the Internet

A lot of readers have been asking us the same question, Adam, so we went straight to the source. According to Capcom, the company's considered porting the game to the PC, but at the moment, has no plans to do so. Damn shame, if you ask us. —*Ed.*

Feel the Power

I loved Willem Knibbe's "Empowered" story (Nov. 1996, page 58). I don't think I've ever read an article about upgrades that had me laughing uncontrollably. Upgrading a computer is not nearly as daunting as people think. I can remember a few years ago when I wanted to upgrade from my 80286. I asked the current "computer specialist" at my workplace for advice on how to do it. He didn't recommend the job and said that he'd never heard of anyone trying to do it. I could see the fear in his eyes. I went for it.

Tracy L. Eckels
Via the Internet

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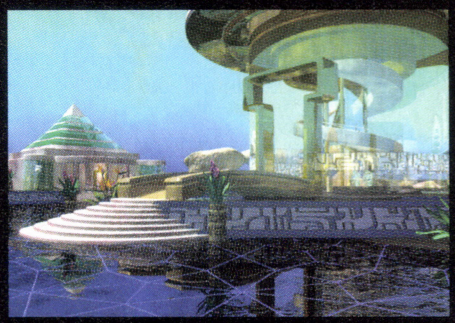

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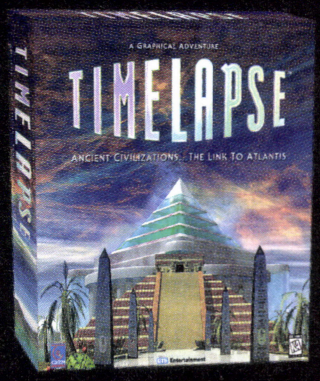


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"There are a lot of gorgeous MYST-style adventures, but this is the best of them all."
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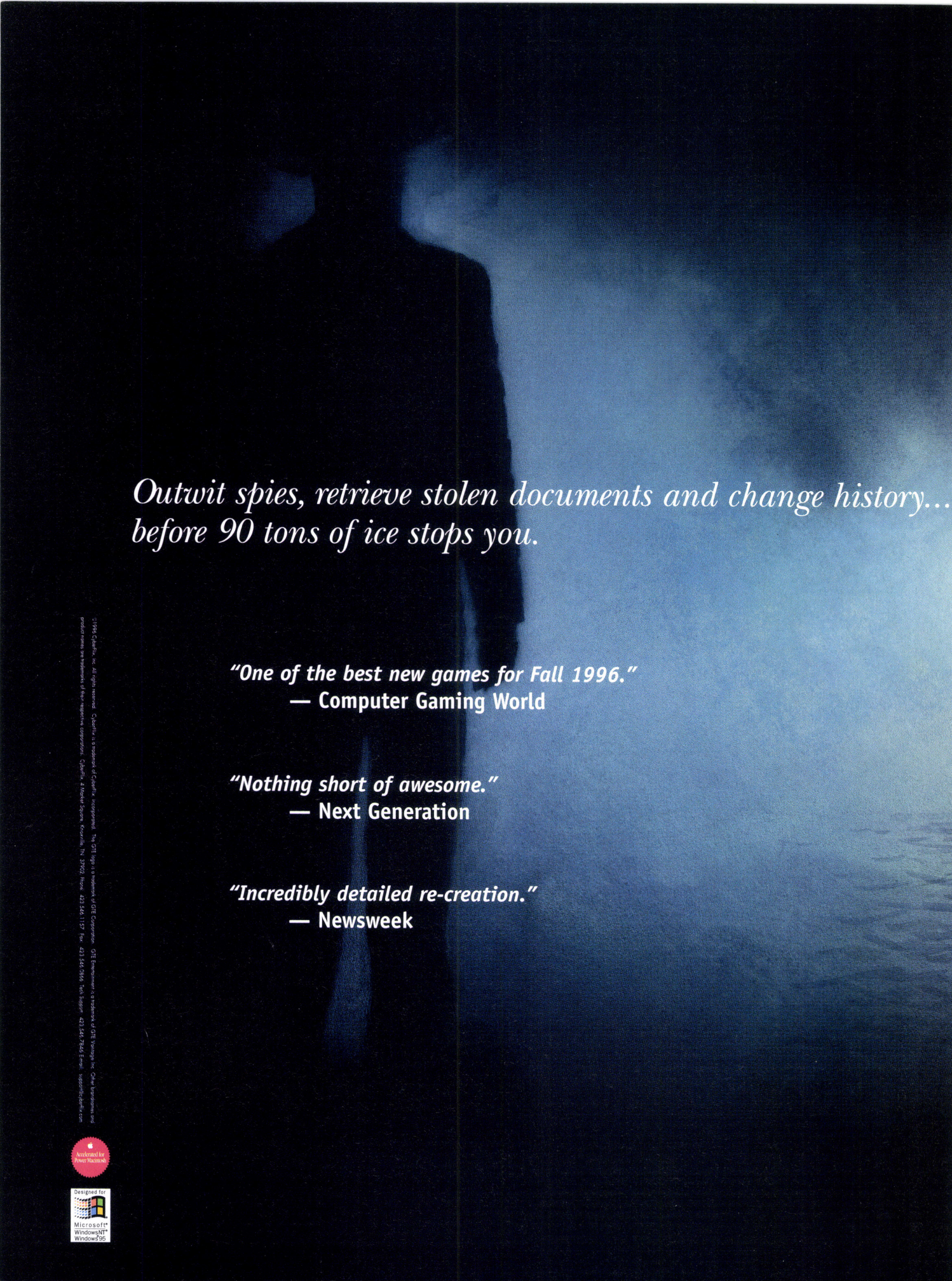
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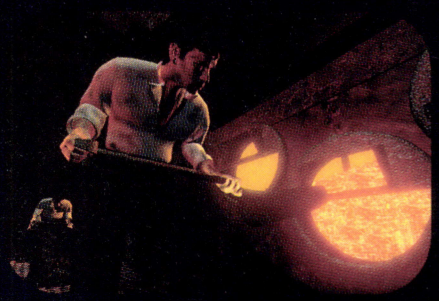

Outwit spies, retrieve stolen documents and change history...
before 90 tons of ice stops you.
"One of the best new games for Fall 1996."
— Computer Gaming World
"Nothing short of awesome."
— Next Generation
"Incredibly detailed re-creation."
— Newsweek
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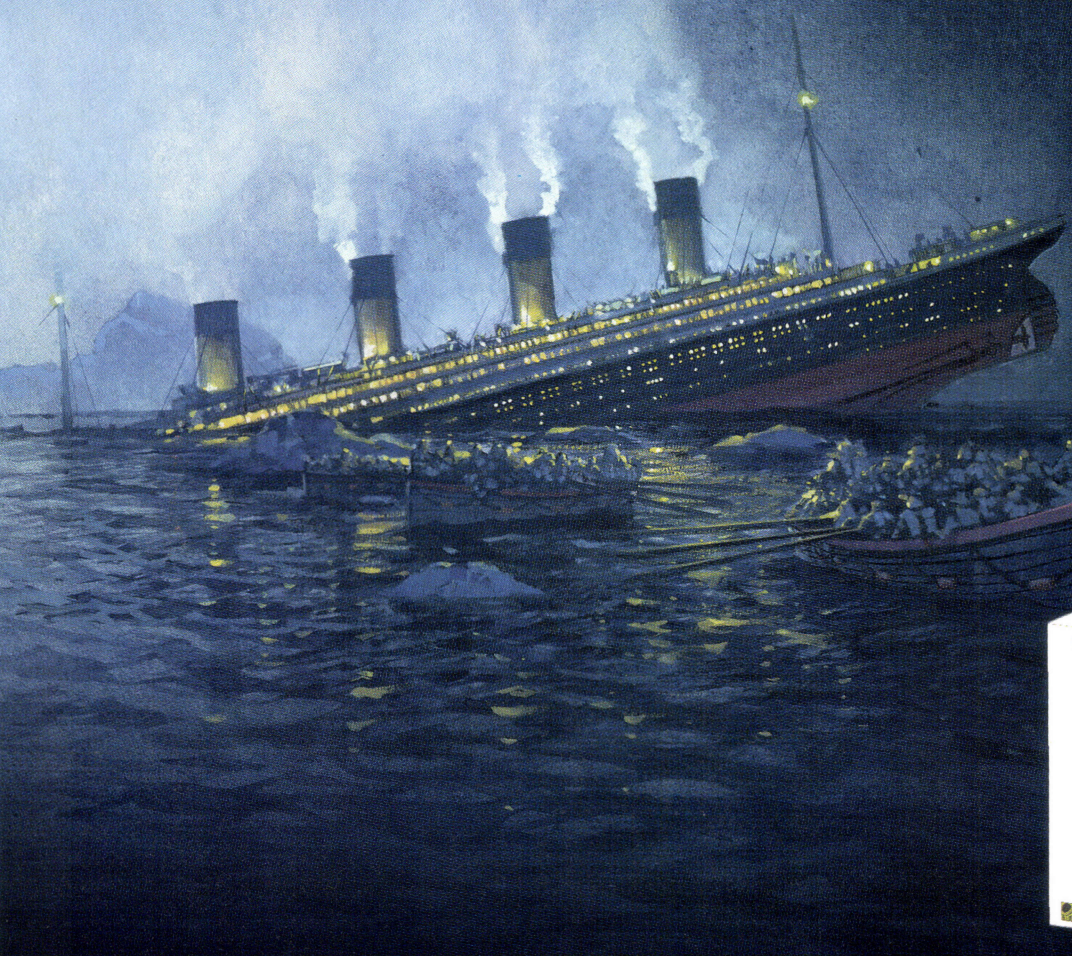
It's the Titanic's fateful night and you play a British agent – the key figure entangled in a race against time to change the course of 20th century history.

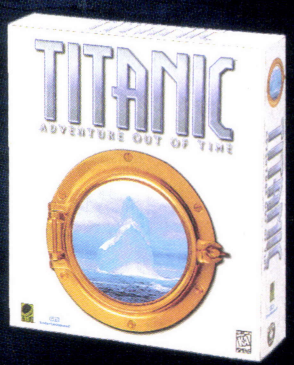


Advanced 360° movement puts you on board an historically accurate SGI rendition of the Titanic as you search for clues and secret documents in fully explorable 3D environments.



A story of intrigue and disaster unfolds as you interact with over 25 fully animated characters who remember your responses and act accordingly as you criss-cross their paths.





A Graphical Adventure

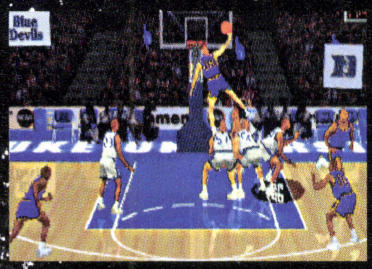
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GTE Entertainment

CYBERFLIX



Network and modem options let you challenge your friends for season or tournament play.



Advanced artificial intelligence lets you grow players from freshman to senior year.



Extensive recruiting feature let's you rebuild your team after each season of play.

64 Division I Teams

Extensive Recruiting

3D SGI Graphics

Network and Modem - to - Modem Play

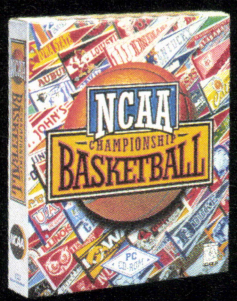
March Madness[sm]

National Champion

"This is as close as you can get to college hoops without putting on the uniform yourself."
— Computer Game Review

"...NCAA Championship Basketball combines arcade style 5-on-5 hoops play with a sophisticated sim of Division I coaching life."
— PC Games

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KIDS TO ADULTS
AGES 6+

PC CD-ROM

NCAA

GTE Entertainment



Visit Sierra on the Internet and you can get a game of Power Chess.

Staying Right At Home

With the online gaming world now a serious reality, more game companies are starting to keep control of their properties under their own roofs. The immense popularity of the Internet, and the relative ease with which companies can engineer online aspects for those games not dependent on split-second performance, is leading some firms to handle play through their own Web sites.

Take Sierra On-Line, which has been this route before. The Sierra Network was the first company-specific online gaming service years ago, and even after its sale and transformation into the present-day ImagiNation Network, Sierra maintained a close relationship with INN; its CyberPark site at **www.inngames.com** will feature several Sierra games for online play.

Yet, Sierra has also developed its own Web-based play area, the Sierra Internet Gaming Service (SIGS), for people who want to play Power Chess, the Hoyle card-game series, or Trophy Bass 2. A simple log on at **www.sierra.com** and an opponent-choice function that's built into the games can have you playing a lovely 3D game of chess on a customizable board with a friend or stranger in a fairly short time.

Sierra's certainly not the only company to create its own gaming Web site. Microsoft already has The Gaming Zone up and running (see "Gaming on the Internet," page 75), Blizzard is joining the fray with battle.net, and id Software's Quakeworld is due to go active soon. In addition, Activision is developing NetStorm for its own server, a system that could support the multiplayer facets of its other forthcoming titles.

The advantages are obvious for all sides. On a Web where mindshare is paramount, the companies get to beam their name and messages at you on a continual basis. Plus, the play sites help them develop a market for a game like Power Chess that might not be too high-profile otherwise. "We think that for a game like Power Chess, online play can help it stand above other products of that type," says Scott Lynch, general manager of Sierra Northwest. Meanwhile, gamers who'd rather take on slower games avoid the costs associated with the dedicated gaming services. And the future promises innovations like distributed servers and non-TCP-based protocols that may ease the move toward fast action games over the Net. Sounds good to us. —*Donald St. John*

Return of Sega Arcade

Twitch gamers will soon have some new SegaSoft titles to twitch over.

Virtua Squad (it's actually the arcade hit Virtua Cop, with its name changed due to various legal wranglings) offers true-3D polygonal mayhem as you shoot your way through three crime-infested environments. As usual, plugging hostages is a bad thing; but feel free to nail just about everything else on the screen.

Meanwhile, two new driving titles aim to put SegaSoft into high gear. **Sega Rally Championship**, a Windows 95–native title, is big on power turns, skids and slides, and getting air on jumps. Track conditions play a major factor: mud and dirt, for example, can make the road even more treacherous than usual. You can race in any of six different cars, each with its own track-busting attributes, viewing the impressive 3D scenery from either a cockpit or chase perspective.



Sega Rally Championship gives you a 3D arcade rush.

For speedsters who prefer the traditional oval to the open road, the PC release of **Daytona Racing** may be worth a look. Incredible 3D graphics make it an eyeful, but a word of warning is in order: You'll need serious muscle metal to meet the demanding hardware requirements for running it on most systems. When we previewed it at the SegaSoft offices, Sega's own demo machines couldn't handle it at its high-detail settings.

Returning to Sega's arcade roots, gamers searching for a nostalgic glow may be intrigued by **Sonic and Knuckles**, a giant compilation of Sonic the Hedgehog's adventures. Play in a one-player or two-player split-screen mode, running Sonic or Knuckles through their paces in a truly vast playground. Ten minutes into the game, you'll forget you're at a PC and start reaching for the reset button on your Sega Genesis. Old hedgehogs never die—they just get ported. (Sega; 800-733-7288; www.sega.com)

—*Daniel Morris*

The Stuff of Myth and War

Own 'em or loathe 'em, you have to admit, Bungie games are always a little different. Just look at their history: In 1993's Pathways Into Darkness, the then-Mac-only developer's first major title introduced the first-person shooter to a computer platform pining for this kind of action. Then came Marathon, one of the first—and still one of the only—Doom clones to work a complex, compelling story into the game. This year, as the company went multiplatform, PC users got Abuse, a unique, run-and-shoot sidescroller, and a port of Marathon 2. So what's next?



This Weekend Warrior's got his trusty mailbag. Isn't that against the law?

For fighting fans, there's **Weekend Warrior**, a brawl unlike anything you've ever seen. Picture Xenophage, Toshinden, and TV's *Married With Children* mashed together and poured into the "futuristic game show" mold. Huge, 3D versions of everyday people—the Mailman, the Butcher, the Sports Fan, the Bag Lady—have at it in a series of bizarre, multi-elevated arenas. No blood or brain matter here; you're fighting for prizes, not pride. Solve puzzles, escape traps, and pummel your opponents while a wise-cracking host comments on the action.



One of Myth's cooler features: blood that stains the battlefield.

Real-world physics, shifting camera angles, and graphics designed to take advantage of 3D acceleration hardware should add to the mayhem. So should the game's multiplayer options, which let you network with up to five other people. You'll also be able to scan people's faces onto the fighters' bodies using a special FaceMapping option. Will it be a Weekend Winner? Find out in January.

Then stick around, for the stuff of **Myth**. That's the working name for a game promising to "explode the current paradigm of real-time strategy" with some truly amazing new features. You like Z? You like Warcraft? Get ready for this.

Set in a richly detailed fantasy world, Myth pits you against "a malevolent deity made flesh" and his legions of Fallen Lords. Only one army can stop them from laying waste to the living, and you're in charge.

More important than the story, says Bungie, is the game's realism—real physics, real terrain, real weather, real lighting. Rocks and heads will roll downhill; blood will stain the landscape. And an adjustable camera will let you see every bit of this fully 3D world, so you can revel in the gore.

Bungie also claims the game will have better AI, networking, and customization than previous real-time strategy games. Cross-platform networking will enable multiple players to engage in battles of attrition or in alternate scenarios like Capture-the-Flag and King of the Hill using maps designed specifically for network play. Meanwhile, a user-programmable scripting language will let you reprogram monsters, change game variables, and even change the rules of netgames.

That's some big boasting. Will Myth live up to its moniker? If it does, it's sure to become a strategy legend. (Bungie Software; 800-295-0060; www.bungie.com)

—Corey Cohen

GAME BYTES

id, or Just I?

The aftermath of Quake continues. Jay Wilbur, the self-proclaimed and oft-quoted "biz guy" at phenomenally successful id Software, is the latest worthy to leave the company—in his case, to pursue full-time fatherhood for a while. Wilbur's departure follows by a few months that of John Romero, the conceptual mind behind Doom and Quake. What does that mean for Quake-meisters? Watch this space...

Goin' Back to Kilrathi

For those already nostalgic for the early years of the Wing Commander series, Origin is releasing Wing Commander: The Kilrathi Saga, a collection of the first three WC titles in a Win 95–native format. (Origin Systems; 800-245-4525; www.ea.com/origin/english/index.html; under $40)

Hunter Back on Patrol

SSI is set to issue an expansion disc for its WWII submarine sim Silent Hunter. The Patrol Disc features two new patrol zones, which allow you to prosecute the naval war against Japan in Malaysia and the Sulu Sea (between the Philippine Islands and Borneo). In addition, you get 15 new ready-made scenarios modeled from historical engagements. (Strategic Simulations Inc.; 800-601-7529; www.ssionline.com)

MoreCraft II

Tore through not only Warcraft II but the Beyond the Dark Portal expansion disc as well? Never fear. 734 Maps for Warcraft II, from newcomer Cybertooth Technology, offers exactly—wild guess here—734 new maps for map-starved Warcrafters,

Studio 3DO Goes PC



The portal to Studio 3DO's Meridian 59.

Having just acquired New World Computing, Studio 3DO is moving fast on developing a new line of original PC titles.

First out the door is **Nitro Racers**, a fast-paced miniature-car racing game in the style of the arcade classic Super Sprint. Battle for position against eight computer opponents or connect up to eight players over a LAN to compete on Nitro Racers' 30 circuits. Simple and user-friendly, Nitro Racers will come complete with a track editor. The race begins in January.

Next, there's **Army Men**, a real-time strategy game with yet another spin on the genre. Green toy soldiers are released from a toy box and placed in photo-realistic battlegrounds against four computerized generals on the tan toy-soldier side. Six command vehicles and six unit types can be maneuvered in two-player mode, using either a modem link or split-screen mode. The war begins in April.

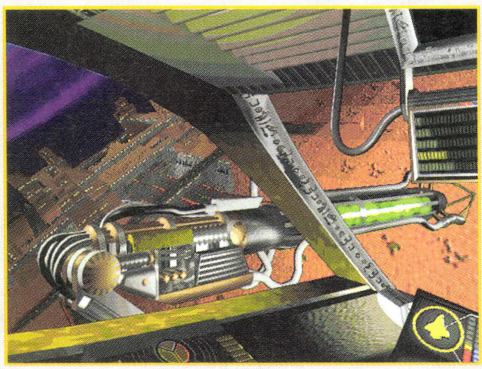
Galactic Conquest: Portal of Succession will join a slew of space strategy/combat sims due next summer. As one of five races, each with its own distinct style, the fate of the universe is in your hands.

Finally, **Meridian 59** was released as the first 3D graphics, multiuser dungeon (MUD). See our review on page 111.

—Rob Smith

Interplay's Sandbox

Action/strategy fans will get a unique viewpoint in **SandWarriors**. Unlike other real-time strategy games like Command & Conquer or Warcraft, SandWarriors filters the genre through a first-person 3D lens.



The setting is ancient Egypt, 6225 B.C., where two alien families, the benevolent House Osiris and malicious House Set, struggle for the right to colonize the earth. The game's 30 missions involve uncovering ancient alien technologies, exposing spies, and rescuing explorers.

Interplay expects to ship SandWarriors in spring 1997. (Interplay; 800-468-3775; www.interplay.com)

—Daniel Morris



Avoid crashes with Gravis' new pad, the GamePad Pro.

New Gravis Peripherals

Fire when ready, Gridley! Advanced Gravis is set to unveil a new line of peripherals for PC gamers. The company's offerings include the **PC GamePad Pro**, a souped-up version of the classic Gravis pad, and the **Blackhawk** joystick.

The GamePad Pro ditches the old PC GamePad's flat design for a dual-grip design, á la PlayStation pad. It's got 10 buttons, a built-in Y-cable for multiplayer play at a single port, and GrIP compatibility for owners of Gravis' multiplayer game system. The GamePad Pro also includes easy-to-use software for quick button programming in Win 95—a feature that could place the pad into cutthroat competition with Microsoft's SideWinder pad.

The Blackhawk joystick is for gamers who want a good stick without any hassles or heavy learning curve. The throttle is set right next to the grip on the joystick base, which is solidly weighted to keep the stick settled right where you put it. Gravis hopes the Blackhawk, priced at $34.95, will become the budget-conscious stick of choice.

Gravis also announced that its GrIP system will be sold independently of any software bundle (it has thus far been bundled with games) in an effort to bring its price down to a less lofty $84.95. (Advanced Gravis; 604-431-5020; www.gravis.com)

—Daniel Morris

GAME BYTES

including hundreds designed specifically for multiplayer battle.

Exclusively Engage

Continuing with its strategy of adding world exclusives to its roster of online games, Engage Games Online has nabbed Celeris' Virtual Pool. It joins a stable that includes exclusives on Warcraft II, Total Control Football, Descent to Undermountain, and others. (Engage Games Online; 714-752-5510; www.gamesonline.com)

Mech 2 Voodoo

3Dfx Interactive announced the impending release of MechWarrior 2 optimized for the Voodoo Graphics accelerator. The addition of Activision brings the total number of software developers signed on to Total Immersion, 3Dfx's developer program, to 125. (3Dfx; 888-545-5733; www.3dfx.com)

Starship Troopers

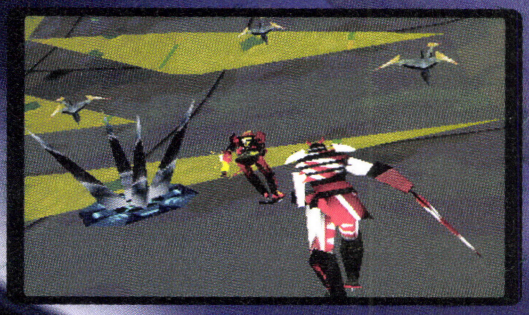
The upcoming Sony Signatures film *Starship Troopers* will receive its translation into a PC game courtesy of MicroProse. The Robert Heinlein sci-fi epic, to be produced by *RoboCop*'s creators (including director Paul Verhoeven), pits Earth soldiers against malicious alien insects. The game will debut for Windows 95 before being ported to the Sony PlayStation.

Ring the Final Bell

Sandbox.net, a Web-based online gaming site, has announced a free stock market simulation called Final Bell (**www.finalbell.com**). Players use the actual New York Stock Exchange to place their mock orders and buy, sell, and trade real-world stock. The actual outcomes of the day's market provide your score in the game—and you play for real prizes. It looks like the perfect pastime for Wall Street junkies with a hankering to play the market (minus financial risks).



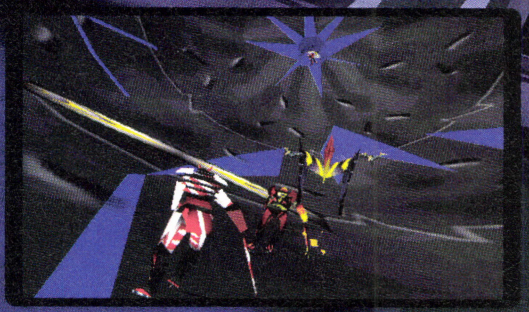
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SCORE WITH THE "ROK" OR YOUR OPPONENT'S SEVERED HEAD. YOUR EQUIPMENT IS SPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR SCORING AND BUTCHERING.



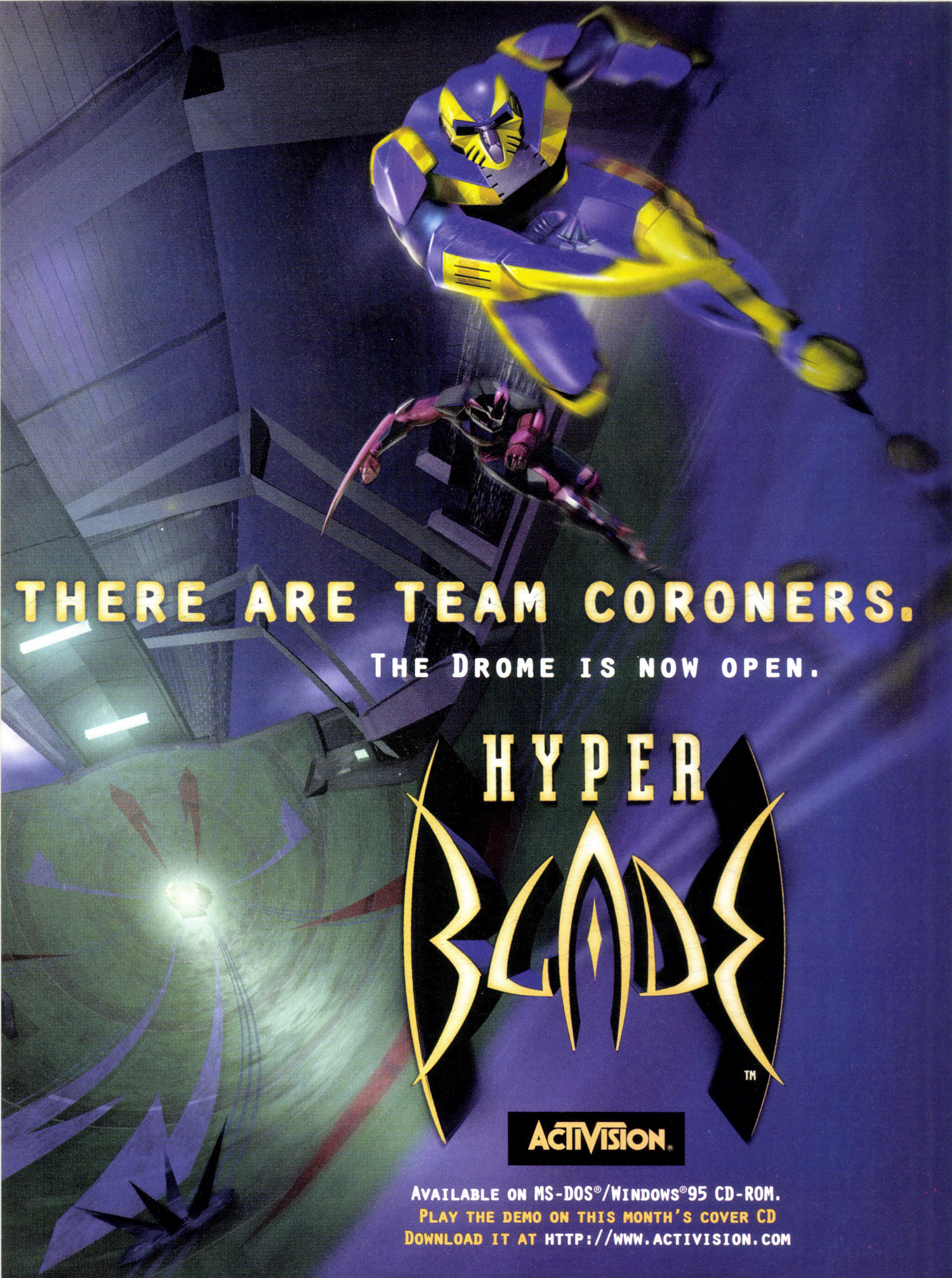
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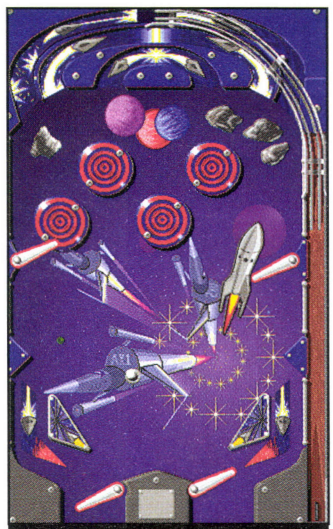
Build It, They Will Come...

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

Two new utilities promise the ultimate tools for game editing to creative types with lots of leisure time on their hands. The **Descent Mission Builder** from Interplay and the **Pinball Builder** from 21st Century Entertainment are perfect for the guy who has the game and wants more—only this time with himself calling the design shots.

The Descent Mission Builder, by the game's developers at Parallax, is a simple CAD-style utility that lets you point, click, drag, and drop your way through the design of your very own Descent mines. With texture previews and auto-lighting, a lot of the work is done for you, but real customization hawks have plenty of features they can experiment with, including kickers, lamps, jets, and more. (Interplay; 800-468-3775; www.interplay.com)

Pinball Builder lets you design, build, and play your own virtual pinball tables. The stellar touch is the ability to import .PCX and .BMP files; the mind boggles at the possibilities. I'm going on record: My design for a *Friends* table, featuring the expressly prohibited reproduction of several NBC-copyrighted stills, will be the hit of the office. 1,000 points for lighting up Courtney Cox—yessir! (21st Century Entertainment; 716-872-1200; www.21stcent.com) —*Daniel Morris*



Pinball Builder—a bit easier than assembling a real table.

A Game Any Time of Day

Someday, we won't have to jam those shiny silver disc thingies into our computers to play games, and we'll always be able to find a human opponent. A new Java-based Web site anticipates that idealized future with a set of board-style games that you can play against other visitors to the site.

PlaySite (**www.playsite.com**) hopes to step out from the rapidly growing world of Java-based games by making it easy to arrange a real-time person-to-person contest instead of just playing against the computer. Although chess, checkers, backgammon, and Reversi can be found in Java versions throughout the Web, you can enjoy PlaySite versions by connecting with a human partner in one of the site's chat rooms. In addition to these launch titles, founder Seth Tapper says that original Java-based games should appear within a year.

"There are obviously a lot of people out there with great ideas that are workable in Java, and we'll always seek those people out," Tapper says. "We can give them exposure on a site that's already popular and growing more so." PlaySite also has Java-based chat rooms that have attracted hundreds of people by word of mouth, Tapper says.

PlaySite is currently free; eventually, there may be small charges for exclusive original content or tournament participation. You'll need a Java-enabled browser such as Netscape Navigator 3.0 or Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0 to play on the site. (PlaySite; 212-965-9773) —*Donald St. John*



There's a human behind that screen! PlaySite features multiplayer Web versions of Java-based board games.

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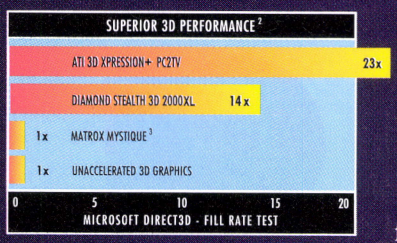
3 OUT OF 4 GAME CHARACTERS SURVEYED

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1600x1200 (NI)	●		
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Smooth Video Scaling	●	●	
Performance (WinMarks)[1]	40.7M	35.9M	35.5M
Price	$199 (2MB)	$219	$199

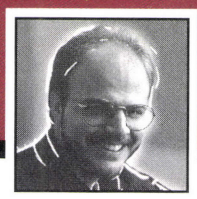


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THE PLAYER



STEVE KLETT

Should All Bad Games Be Forgot...



Ahhh, New Year's—the time most of us look back at the past year, ruminate fondly on the positives, and vow never to repeat the negatives. Most of us even go so far as to step up to a mic at a party, or pledge solemnly to a friend after a few too many drinks, to make one or several improvements in our lives by the time we ring in the next New Year.

Never one to shun holiday tradition, The Player thought he'd take this opportunity to share some of his own, and, of course, suggest one for the industry as well. Will any be kept? Doubtful, but who knows—maybe a few will make it. You've gotta have goals, right?

(1) Start a Fresh Air camp for gamers.

Yes, The Player has noticed a common pasty complexion shared among his fellow game addicts. You may recognize these signs in some of your friends: hollow, sunken eyes with black circles, shortness of breath, the thousand-yard stare that can only be caused by seeing one's friends get gibbed too many times. The Player's cure: A two-week trip to the great outdoors. The setting: A rustic mountain camp with no electricity or computers for a hundred-mile radius. Victims need only be signed up by a loved one, and they'll be whisked away in the middle of the night. It's tough love, but it'll help.

(2) Cut down on trash talking.

Lately, the game-playing atmosphere in the office has resembled a game of one-on-one between Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson on the big screen—the amount of barbs flying through the air during heated Duke or Quake deathmatches is truly astounding at times, not to mention annoying and bewildering to our office neighbors. Of course, The Player never starts the juvenile banter that goes with multiplayer gaming, but he has been known to escalate it, as everyone knows his dominating play speaks volumes by itself....As you can see, this is one resolution that already doesn't have a chance.

(3) Increase gaming diversity.

Have you noticed many of your favorite flight sim, strategy, or adventure games languishing on the shelves lately, gathering dust as all the new bad-ass first-person action and real-time strategy games suck up your play time? The Player has. 'Twas a time when he'd gladly forsake Doom, Dark Forces, or what have you for some late-night strategizing in Panzer General, dungeon-crawling in Anvil of Dawn, or dogfights in Pacific Air War. It's been easy to forget about his old faves with all the glitzy 3D stuff coming out and the new levels of mayhem to be found in Duke and Quake. The Player's going to go back and hit some of those old classics and some of their newer counterparts to broaden his fun.

(4) Stop poking so much fun at bad, bad games.

Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, The Player can get a little carried away in his zeal to slap the wrist of a company that ships a game that is so obviously bad. He's going to work hard at being nicer. Yeah, right—throw this one out the window, too. If anything, The Player's been too nice and will work harder at giving badly designed and slyly marketed compost the time in the spotlight it so richly deserves. *[Editors' note: At this point, The Player had to be restrained and a cold bucket of water thrown in his face to stop his ranting.]*

(5) Originality!

This is the one and only resolution The Player dares to hope the gaming industry will pick up. How many C&C knockoffs are popping up? How many Doom clones are still appearing, let alone Duke and forthcoming Quake clones? How many games have we seen over the last year based on this premise: Guy wakes up from cryogenic slumber to find himself captured by aliens and needing to escape, or someone wakes up on an island or planet not knowing who they are, or where they are, or what they need to do? If you're going to make a Quake competitor, try something really crazy and give it a good, original story. If you're making a C&C-type game, think of something new—new species or races to fight with or against just don't cut it. How about a different type of gaming experience altogether—coming up with a new genre to copy?

In The Player's humble opinion, everyone making a game or coming up with a design right now can take a lesson from DreamWorks' The Neverhood. The amount of care and passion that went into creating this remarkable piece of entertainment is truly commendable, and is more of what is needed in the game industry these days. Sure, it may be a little short, or a little too easy in places for an adventure game, but it is a true breath of fresh air.

The Player hopes '97 will set a new standard for game inventiveness, as it is becoming clear the technology is there to support new directions and possibilities for gameplay.

Finally, The Player would like to extend a hearty best wishes for the New Year to all of *PC Games*' loyal readers. Cheers, and thanks for reading.

As always, The Player welcomes your thoughts, resolutions, Duke challenges, and criticisms at Sklett@pcgames.com.

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#2 Has removable teeth

#3 Not the kinda girl you can take home for dinner

#4 Flesh-seeking missiles cook victims to perfection

#5 Every kill: finger-lickin' good

#6 "Jaws of Death" shear right through bone

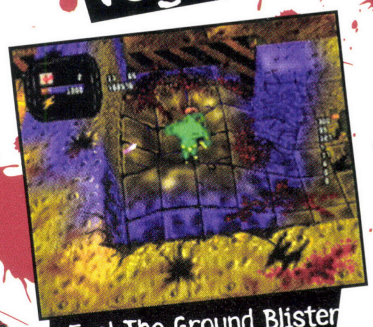
#7 Does regular power lunch with Jeffrey Dahmer & Hannibal Lecter

#8 First date could cost you an arm and a leg

#9 Can spit a ligament over 30 feet

#10 Likes her take-out "extra crispy"

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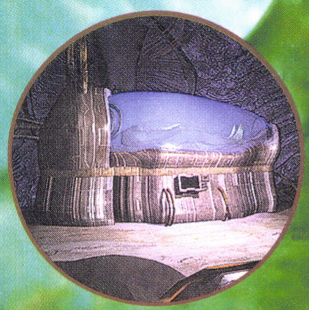
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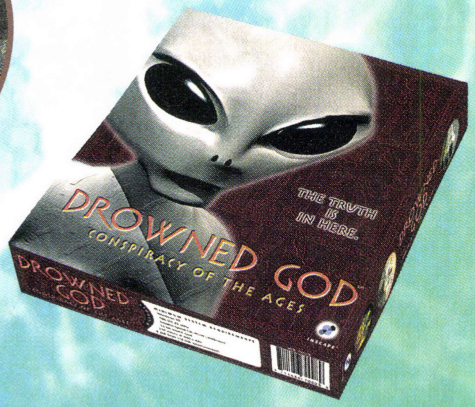
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THE OPPONENT

BLADE

A Multiplayer WasteLANd

Multiplayer gaming is here to stay—so say all of us. Inclusion of null modem and serial connection support, modem options, and online gaming service signups all take up a significant portion of game development time. Many is the occasion when a software company spokesperson informs us that "the game is finished, they're just tweaking the multiplayer parts."

Evidently, this is a difficult area, but one considered sufficiently important to delay game releases. And rightly so: If online and multiplayer gaming are in fact the route to the future, then those elements in these groundbreaking titles should be as perfect as the constraints of technology and deadlines allow.



Notice what's missing from that opening list of multiplayer sources? LAN network support. Many game blurb fact sheets boast that "Game X features 16-player network support." Well, who's ever taken advantage of the 16-player network support of any game other than Quake?

Being in the privileged position of having an office LAN where gaming is not only accepted but actively encouraged, we writers should be in multiplayer heaven. The fact is, we're not much better off than Joe Public in the multiplayer stakes. Why's that? Because we never—and are unlikely to ever—have 16 machines all networked at the same time, all working properly, all with the correct software installed and possessing between them the necessary copies of a game to run over that many machines. And we're the lucky ones.

So what's the point? Does Joe Public give a damn about network and LAN support? While getting 16 people from a crowded office together for a Quakematch may not be uncommon, how many other titles are out on the shelves supporting this network capability—but remaining idle?

That's not to suggest that LAN support should be totally dropped. For one thing, those with the capability would be furious. The point is accessibility, and the simple fact of the matter is that LANs are not accessible by most. The Opponent can't understand why so many enthusiastic dialogues have focused on the future of gaming residing in the multiplayer arena when there are so many limitations to game players actually accessing it.

Server technology á la Quake makes significant inroads into the realm of multiplayer heaven, but this has only recently emerged and apparently gave id Software fits during the development process.

FIFA '97 offers some impressive 20-player support, but only through the curious juggling of resources and the implementation of gamepad devices and technology to fudge the fact that only 8 machines are physically connected.

Where does this leave the game buyer and player? With games stuffed with high-profile technology that's ultimately useless.

Unless.

Unless technology gives Joe Public real access to the joys of many-player multiplayer games. How? Through the online services. Duke Nukem 3D's LAN support will be of benefit to those honored groups with access to the hardware, but it's on TEN that Duke is making real progress and heightening awareness.

Does that mean more game developers should start supporting the online services if they aren't going through the pains of creating their own servers? The Opponent's opinion is a resounding *yes*. Spend part of the time currently going to waste on incorporating LAN technology that will barely, if ever, be used and create either the software to allow games to run on an online gaming service or the full server deals currently in the offing from a few companies.

The bottom line is that 16-player LAN support doesn't mean diddly-squat to the vast majority of game players, but since experts are crying from the rooftops that everyone does want to get online to take full advantage of multiplayer elements, make it accessible. Right now, "accessible" means the online gaming services. If this is the future, more people need easy access to it.

While we all accept that the online gaming services still have some way to go before they manage to overcome the problems of lag (detailed in "All...About...Latency," page 145), they could succeed given the support. Accessibility is the key to successful multiplayer gaming. Game players will use the technology presented to them if they can. TEN and Mplayer currently offer that accessibility, but they aren't going to be able to do it on their own. Game developers, take note: People want to play your games—give them the tools to do it.

The Opponent can be found Quakeing (when he should be working) under the moniker PCG_Blade on Mpath, or on a variety of other servers. And he'll Dukematch all comers on TEN. Send comments to blade@pcgames.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

Into the Realms of 3D

By Rob Smith

Pushing the boundaries of acceptable taste and style, the guys who brought you Duke Nukem 3D are just getting warmed up. Come get some more...



These Shadow Warrior screens reveal the detailed, comprehensive level design that's becoming the hallmark of 3D Realms games.

It's official: Duke Nukem 3D rocks. Invested this issue with the coveted title of *PC Games* Game of the Year, the attitude-oozing action-fest has been something of a sensation. Naturally, the developers at 3D Realms are ecstatic about all this excitement. As die-hard gamers themselves, led by president George Broussard, they have invested a significant amount of time and no end of late-night/early-morning scenarios into bringing some truly astounding examples of PC gameplay into existence.

So everyone's happy, right?

Evidently, things weren't all wine and roses. Last October, with little warning, itchy-feet syndrome struck, whisking away level designers, producers, and programmers from some of 3D Realms' next generation of PC titles. (Perhaps it was some sort of bug floating around the darkest depths of Texas, where id Software also resides, as they both experienced this problem.)

Nevertheless, the forthcoming line-up is suitably impressive, boasting the Plutonium Pak add-on levels for Duke (reviewed here); Shadow Warrior and Blood, both based on enhancements of Duke's Build engine; and the all-new true-3D environment of Prey. Despite denials that these projects were severely hit by the upheavals, some delay was inevitable. But the ship seems to be steadying. 3D Realms has new people on board, including Paul Schuytema, former lead designer of MechWarrior 3, as producer and designer of Prey.

Soon, the games will speak for themselves, but for now, *PC Games* paid a visit to Texas to get the behind-the-scenes scoop on what's afoot at 3D Realms headquarters.



Once in a vehicle, the view switches to third-person.

Prepare to meet your maker.





Time to die—this geezer's had enough.

Shadow Warrior

Initially previewed way back in November 1995, Shadow Warrior takes Duke's Build engine and pushes it to the limits, adding plenty of new features to the innovative level designs that are the hallmark of Duke's quality.



"We listened to what people liked and didn't like in Duke, and did it," says George Broussard. "The most important new feature is allowing rooms above rooms. This creates an even greater sense of involvement in the environments, and it's something that we definitely want to maintain from Duke."

So what's Shadow Warrior all about? 3D Realms is still figuring that out. "We let the game evolve, get the levels in place, and then in the last few weeks go through and look for where the attitude is going to fit," Broussard says. With the exact shape of the storyline still to be finalized, only this part's certain: You play a ninja of Japanese descent. Think *The Karate Kid*'s "wax on, wax off" to get an idea of the kind of wisecracks and accent.

One of the main criticisms leveled at Duke (mainly from Quake devotees) is auto-aiming: it doesn't take a ton of skill to shoot someone on another platform level. That complaint is addressed in Shadow Warrior with an auto-aiming on/off option. "It was actually in Duke, originally," Broussard revealed. "For some reason it didn't end up in the final version. But it's in Shadow Warrior."

Probably the most important additions to Shadow Warrior are the vehicles. Right now, there are seven or eight possibilities, including armored carriers, tanks, forklifts, boats, hoverjets, and bulldozers. Upon meeting them, your immediate concern will be avoiding being mowed down by their rapid cannon fire. But with swift reactions, you'll jump inside the cab, take out the driver, and assume control. Now it's time to cause considerable damage of your own.

In multiplayer mode—a vital component of Shadow Warrior's level construction—getting to vehicles first may be crucial to success. But it won't be the key. "We're going to limit ammo, or make guns overheat quickly to bring back the game balance," said Broussard. "Also, the vehicles can become damaged and will start smoking. Pick up a repair kit, though, and you can fix 'em. This will also affect cooperative play, as one person can drive while the other fires."



Nip under the APC and liberate it from the driver.

A notable Duke feature that's missing from Shadow Warrior is flying; there's no jetpack or similar ability. "The reason for this is that we wanted to integrate more puzzle elements, making people think about how they were going to get access to a particular area rather than simply switching on the jetpack and flying there," Broussard explained.

Visually, there are some more nifty features, like water that appears translucent, enabling you to see into and out of it. Tornadoes and whirlpools that suck you into deep trouble look fantastic and add yet another potential problem to overcome.

Meanwhile, enhanced AI makes enemies climb ladders and fight when it suits them, rather than aimlessly following you to their inevitable demise.

Four mapmakers are currently tweaking the 28 levels that will ship with the full game. (As with Duke and Quake, five or six levels will be in the shareware version.) Two deathmatch-specific levels are also under construction.

2D/3D

Circling around 2D objects and seeing them shift to face you was a limit of Duke's 2.5D engine that you simply had to accept. Shadow Warrior addresses this by using true 3D voxels for all the weapons and items you pick up. Now, you'll be able to walk around for the rear view of semi-naked women. (Frankly, this wasn't in the game when we saw it; but it's coming from the people who brought you the Red Light District, so we'd be surprised if they didn't include it somewhere.)

The Build engine still isn't true 3D, but it's been stretched to extraordinary lengths to create the illusion that was oh-so-familiar in Duke. It's this cartoon realism, the simply insane sense of humor, and the incredibly inventive level designs that are destined to make Shadow Warrior far more than a run-of-the-mill Duke clone.

For those fingers itching to come get some, the shareware episode is due out in January, with the full retail version following around March or April.

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Rail gun



Riot gun





Missile Launcher





Guardian Head (napalm)

Guardian Heart

The Kiss of Death

Rather than limiting you to just 10 weapons, one on each number key, the Shadow Warrior designers have doubled and even tripled up on certain items with a few creative developments of some tried and tested ideas.

1. **Sword/Shuriken**
   Hand-to-hand fighting and throwing stars for distance
2. **Uzis**
   Find two to fire them together
3. **Riot gun**
   A four-barreled rapid-fire shotgun
4. **Missile Launcher**
   Single-fire mode, heatseeker*, and 20-missile multi-fire*
5. **40mm Grenade Launcher**
6. **Sticky bombs**
   These cling to walls, ceilings, and creatures and explode when touched
7. **Rail gun*** (an ultra-high-speed "nailgun" á la *Eraser*)
8. **Guardian Heart***
   The heart of the Ripper monster, which flings magical, er, stuff
9. **Guardian Head***
   Fires a stream of fireballs, a ring of fire, or napalm blasts

* = only available in registered version

Sticky bombs



Build for Life

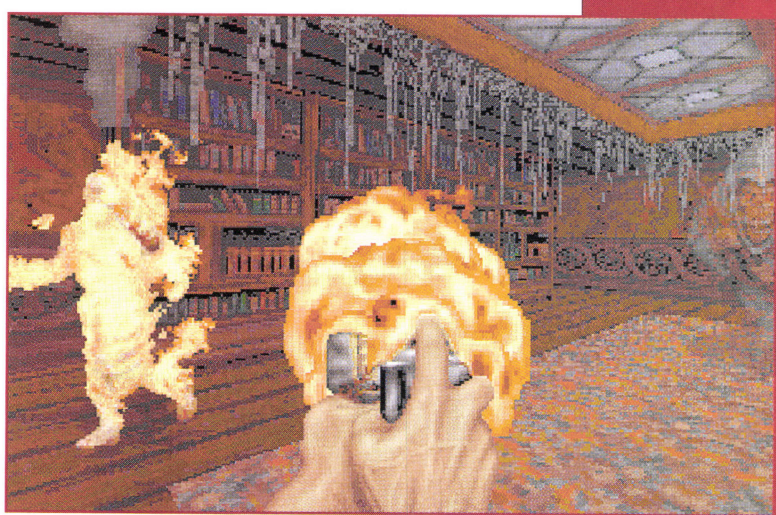
While the level editors for Shadow Warrior and Duke are essentially the same, you won't be able to port SW levels, weapons or monsters into the Duke universe. Broussard did say this, however: "If there is enough demand, we might do a Duke to Shadow Warrior map converter or something to handle the basic architecture. The special effects will have to be redone, as both games use different tagging systems."



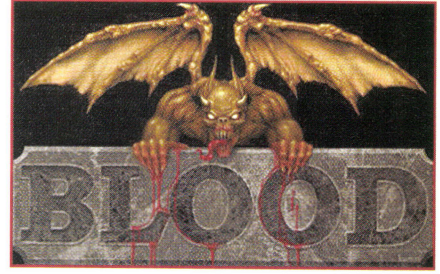
Double trouble with two Uzis.



Hand-to-hand with a pitchfork in the face—that's gotta hurt.



The spray can/lighter interface is sure to upset a few monsters.



can be booted around in a manner typically disrespectful of the dead. (There's a soccer-field user level just waiting to happen.)

While Monolith may struggle with the limitations of the Build engine in trying to add light-source shading to weapons fire, they have certainly come up with original ways of dealing death to the numerous monsters. The list currently includes a pitchfork, dynamite, double-barreled shotgun (fire one or both barrels), a flare gun (with flares that penetrate the victim, pause, then explode), and a spray can with lighter (a makeshift flamethrower—don't try this at home, kids).

The reliable rocket launcher will appear in some capacity, but one of the most original weapons has to be the voodoo doll. Stabbing it causes instant death to some enemies; just be careful not to stab your own thumb and inflict unnecessary supernatural damage.

With the horror theme still being fine-tuned, a beast mode, entered after slaying a certain number of monsters in quick succession, has yet to be finalized. Slashing away with bladed claws in hand-to-hand combat should make an interesting spectacle.

Blood: First-Person Horror

In Blood, the Build engine is taking a slightly different turn under the wing of Monolith, a 3D Realms affiliate that's been given the freedom to tweak the technology in a slightly different way than the 3D Realms team. Because Blood is not scheduled for release until some time around the middle of next year, many elements have yet to be finalized. As with Shadow Warrior, much of the attitude will be added in the final weeks of development.

Right now, 3D Realms is still trying to decide exactly who your character's going to be. A lame monk guy has been shelved, but many options are circulating.

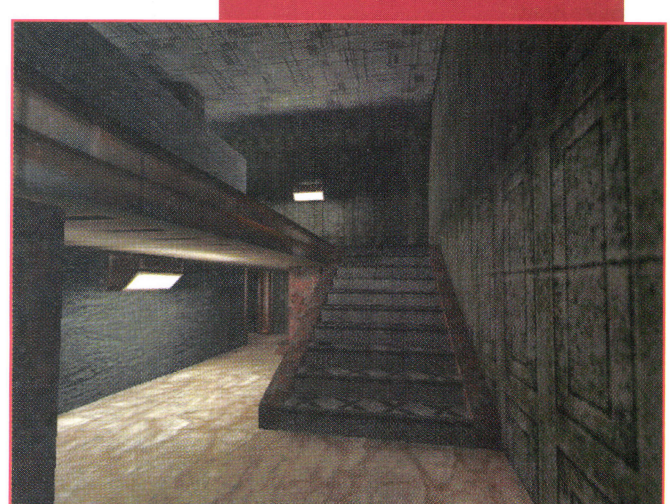
Some very neat features are already in place, though. How about a bit of head soccer? Monsters' decapitated noggins



Stab the voodoo doll for instant death.

Prey: 1998

What with staff turnover and all, it comes as no surprise that hotly tipped Quake-killer Prey is now on course for an early 1998 release. News as and when it happens.



Prey

THINK ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE? THINK AGAIN!

AND AGAIN
AND AGAIN
AND AGAIN

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Don't joke about his height or he'll bash in your kneecaps.



Amputation, just what the doctor ordered.



On second thought, maybe you shouldn't have skinned her babies.



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The Barbarian table.





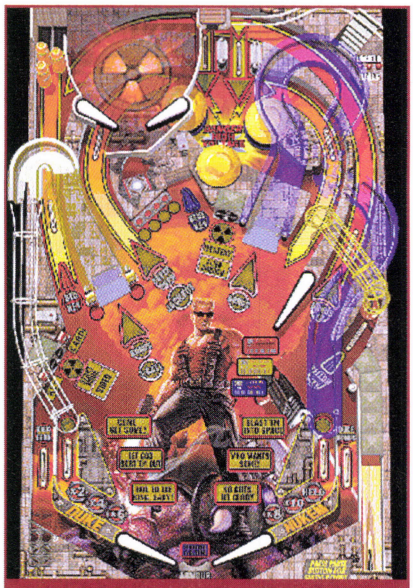
The Firestorm table.

Balls of Steel

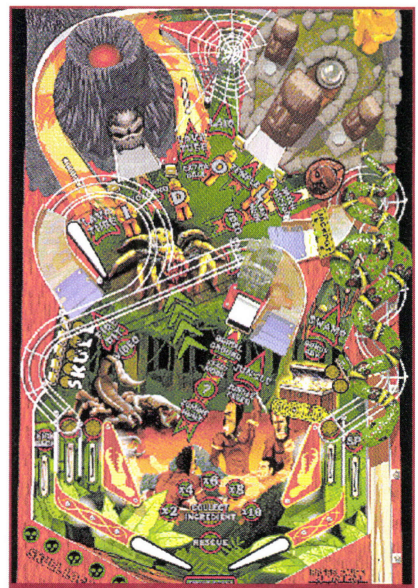
Even the familiar sight of a pinball table is getting the 3D Realms treatment in Balls of Steel, a collection of six fun, highly detailed, action-oriented tables. A Duke table featuring the hero doing a bit of singing should be quite amusing, and in a departure from other pinball games, there's gonna be blood! (Gee, that's a surprise.)

Several missions with a coherent story for each table will be a novel twist to the usual disconnected themes of most pinball games. Five-ball multiball and lots of voices to maintain the speed and atmosphere should set this apart from the plunger competition.

A one-table shareware version is due soon, with the full version ready soon after.



Come get some shiny balls.



Devils will have plenty of voodoo.

Duke Down the Line

A popular character such as Duke is not going to be kept out of the spotlight for long. His appearances over the next two years are already in the planning phase. Duke Forever is going to be "a truly awesome, groundbreaking sidescroller featuring Duke's voice" said Broussard. It's due for release in late 1997.

To make the Christmas '97 release date, work on the next Duke 3D game will be underway before the year is out. The as-yet-unnamed project will still be based on Build, but will incorporate 3D sprites and rooms on top of rooms. The setting is also being decided, although Vegas has been mentioned as one possibility. Duke would be right at home among the glaring neon, shooting craps and taking in the, ahem, sights. Surely it's an opportunity too good to miss for the 3D Realms crew. Think of all the fun to be had doing the research!

"When we finish this short project, we'll likely use the Prey engine (or a modified version) for a true 3D, six-degrees-of-freedom Duke to start in late 1997," Broussard added. That's the scoop... ■

George Kicks Ass

Game reviewers are in the privileged position of having to play games like Duke 3D. The fact that we thoroughly enjoy the maniacal deathmatches and associated bad-mouthing, sniping, and trash talking is just our good fortune. We also like to pit our skills against others. So when George Broussard got excited about the chance to kick some reporter butt, it was an indication of just how much fun and lasting appeal Duke retains.

On Hollywood Holocaust, a level well known to all, George, editor Steve Klett and I got down to action. While Steve emerged with at least a semblance of dignity in his 18 kills, my paltry 10 was an embarrassing sight against George's emphatic 50!

As I hung my head in shame, George beamed. Shooting editors seemed to be an opportunity he relished. "We have three of the best Dukers in the world here, with me being the worst of them, so you didn't even play your best and I still kicked the life out of you! (smile)" Note to remember—practice needed. —RS

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Kicking these rotates the chamber 90 degrees.

The Crystal

Drop it in your reactor to increase your time.

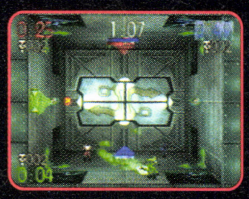
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Your opponent is time... Because when your clock hits zero, you're cooked.

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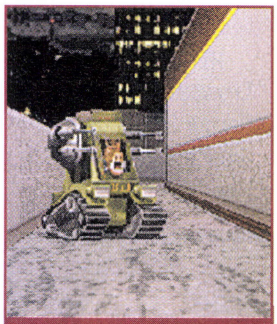
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Duke Nukem 3D: Plutonium Pak



Pig Cop Tank



Protector Drone

User-created Duke levels are available by the thousands for anyone with an inkling to download them. But the arrival of the official add-on, Plutonium Pak, proves one thing: There are amateurs, and then there are 3D Realms' professionals. A new episode—The Birth, consisting of nine new levels, a new weapon and new enemies, plus a few cosmetic changes—continues our hero's fight against alien scum.

He's back—badder, bloodier, and more tasteless than ever

The Plutonium Pak upgrades the full CD 1.3D version to 1.4. It adds nothing new to the original three episodes, but has a new interface with a couple of extra options, including entering a TEN game.

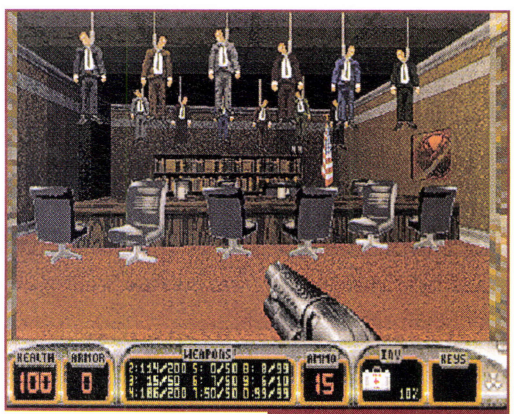
Sadly, where 3D Realms is always looking to push the boundaries of good taste and attitude, it slipped over the edge of decency with a staggeringly unnecessary opening scene. We can hear the complaints coming already. Don't say you haven't been warned.

But the good things in these new levels still outweigh the questionable ones. First off, a new monster, the Protector Drone, can be deadly, throwing shrinker rays from a distance and slashing with vicious claws at close quarters. They're tough, too, taking six shotgun blasts to down. They, er, protect the Queen Alien, the all-new, bad-ass boss.

The pig cops have been given a new vehicle. The mini-tank is a fast-firing device offering great protection to the porky ones. A switch on the back initiates a self-destruct that explodes with tremendous force (run fast and far). While it's pretty cool for a while, this machine's amazing turning circle, on top of its incredible ability to do small jumps from its flat rollers, makes it a depressing, almost unbalancing enemy.

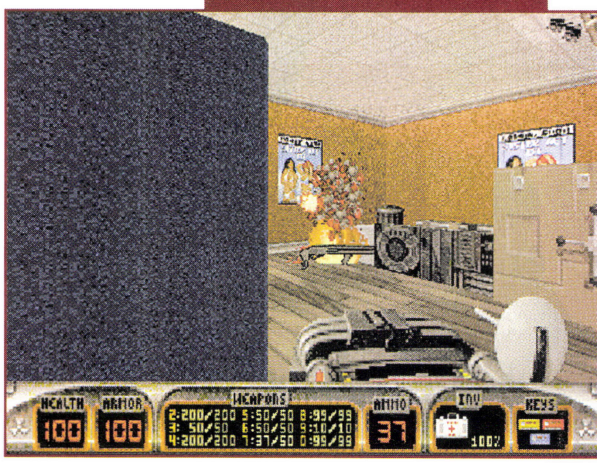
The Expander is an attachment to the Shrinker, rather than a whole new weapon. It microwaves its victims, making them swell until they explode. This one's deliciously nasty, especially in deathmatches. That's good, because the levels themselves were designed specifically for Dukematches, which will make for some classic, bloody buddy battles.

Attitude, of course, is in abundance. If there's a chance to poke fun at a movie, be it *Mission: Impossible*, *Terminator 2*, *Independence Day*, or a host of others, 3D Realms is not reluctant to go for a cheap laugh. Backed by more of Duke's characteristic wiseass commentary, unearthing new areas is a complete joy.



A hung jury—groan.

The Expander is a microwave-firing add-on to the Shrinker.



With the subtle (and not-so-subtle) gags, it's worth clicking on every item; just be prepared for a few shocks.

A hefty install routine required a re-installation of the full Duke on all the machines we tested it on, but that's still an acceptable price to pay for the quality of these new levels. There are some great user-created levels out there, but it takes time and care to create worlds as well-rounded and complete as those in the Plutonium Pak. It's going to sell by the truckload—and rightfully so.

DUKE NUKEM 3D: PLUTONIUM PAK

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

A- OVERALL

Mmm—I'm looking good.

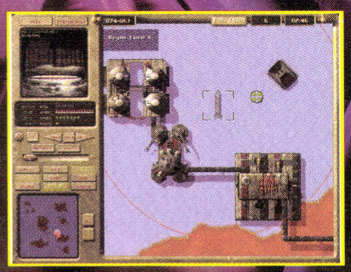
DEVELOPER: 3D Realms
PUBLISHER: GT Interactive
800-332-4300
www.3drealms.com
PLATFORM: DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, VGA, retail version of Duke Nukem 3D
LIST PRICE: $29.95

TIPS ▼ As in the regular game, look for messages scrawled on walls. ▼ In Babe Land, save your RPGs and devastator ammo for the Pirates of the Caribbean. You'll need 'em to take out the cannons from a distance. ▼ To access the secret level, click on the George Washington portrait in Pig Sty. ▼ The combination for the puzzle at the end of Area 51 is on a wall in the level.

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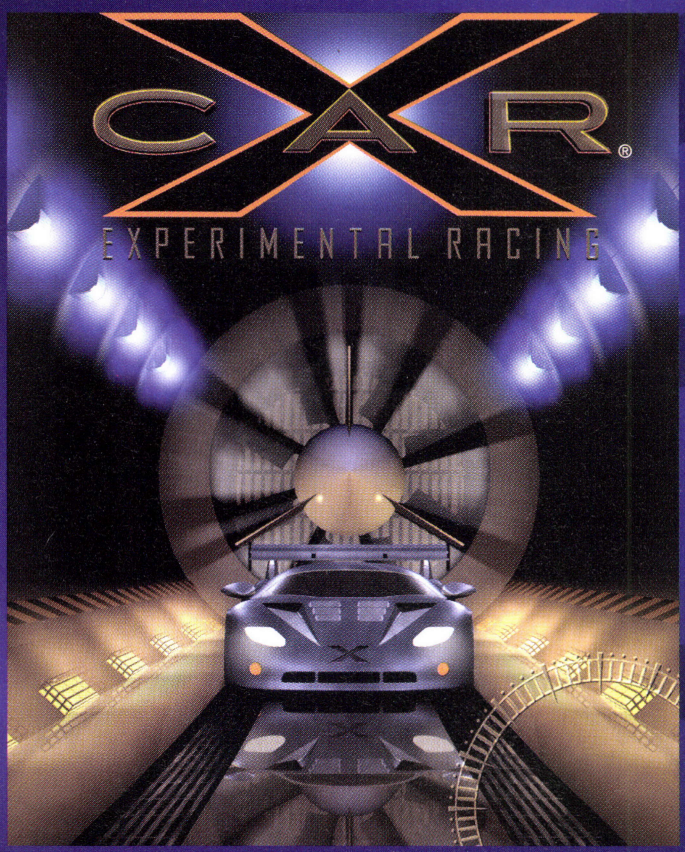
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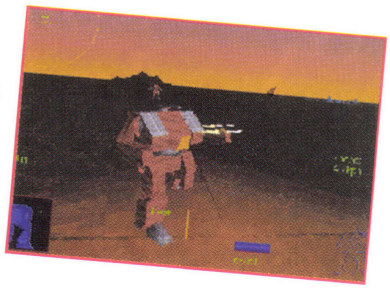
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THE 4th ANNUAL





EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS

PC GAMES™

1997

It's all we do, 24-7-365—play, play, and when it's quitting time, play some more. In fact, we see and play virtually every game released—big and small, known and obscure, hyped and hopeless. At the end of the year, we tear ourselves away from the computers, lock ourselves down in a conference room with well-padded walls, and separate the greats from the grunts to deliver the hard-bitten, truth-tellin' PC Games Editors' Choice Awards.

If it's anywhere near this list, you know it's good. If it actually gets our highly critical approval, it's simply the best. Here you'll find all our winners, plus an explanation of what made the best stand out from the rest. Where the debate raged almost too close to call, we opted for a runner-up; but in many categories, only one choice ascended to gaming glory.

There were some tough calls; but, dammit, that's what they pay us for.

By Daniel Morris

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Duke Nukem 3D

(Apogee/3D Realms)

Damn, those bastards at 3D Realms are gonna pay for sucking up all our time...because Duke is how we spent it. How many hours? Combining the staff, we're looking at thousands of man-hours over our office LAN alone, not including our home online play. For the benefit of our publisher, we hasten to add that these were "after-hours" hours. Ahem.

As we sat down to pick our Game of the Year, everyone knew there were two candidates: Duke and Quake. Both had vociferous proponents, and the action got ugly. Some were tempted to settle the matter in the parking lot, with the help of some nailguns and freezethrowers.

We'll say it here and say it loud: Quake is without a doubt the gaming blast of the year. Though it might suffice to briefly explain our choice, we're going to detail some of the specifics of this close race—namely, why Duke is a better game than Quake. Our argument took days, so here's the *Reader's Digest* version:

While we concede Quake every technical merit, it just doesn't have that elusive quality the philosophers call a soul. Quake has a lot of style and some serious personality, but Duke is the one we hang out with—the wit, the creativity, the interaction with the garishly colorful environment. If Quake is the big summer blockbuster movie that everybody has to see at least once, Duke is the kick-butt B-movie that you've got on tape and watch again and again and again.

We've all got our war stories. For some of us, it's the matches spent as a Duke newbie, helpless to fight back as we were shrunk and pathetically squashed beneath the Mighty Boot of a laughing, uncaring editor who will go unnamed (but his initials are Steve Klett). For others, it's the time you rounded a corner and found yourself knee-deep in a pile of pipebombs with only enough time to groan "Damn..." before you were blown sky-high. Or the first time you stepped to the mic and delivered a crooning song, or offered a hooker some cash for a "flash dance." Or left a knee-high tripwire surprise for a pursuer. Or froze a buddy and laughed in his face before kicking him to shards.

That's Duke: rough, racy, more than a little nasty, and the most enjoyable game of the year. If Quake offers us a taste of tomorrow, Duke Nukem 3D serves up a foam-topped pint of gaming today.

So pop a tab and cool your heels for a while, Duke. Damn, you're good.

"Quake has a lot of style and some serious personality, but Duke is the one we hang out with..."



Duke 3D

RUNNER-UP:

Quake

(id Software)

Needless to say, these two mixed it up not only for Year's Best honors, but for those of Best Action and Best Multiplayer Game as well.

EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS
PC GAMES
1997

BEST ACTION GAME

Duke Nukem 3D

Runner-Up: Quake

BEST MULTIPLAYER GAME

Duke Nukem 3D

Runner-Up: Quake

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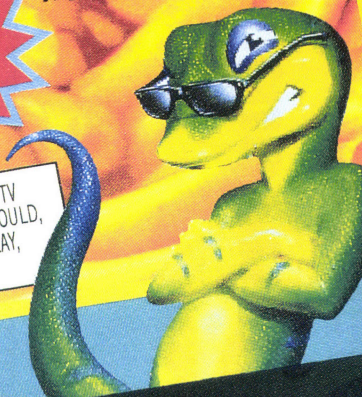
Inside You'll Find:



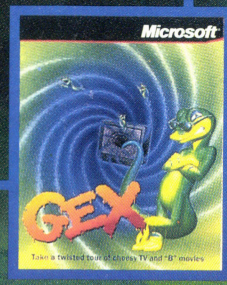
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A good tongue-lashing



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Quake



Pandora Directive

EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS
PC GAMES
1997

BREAKTHROUGH GAME

Quake

(id Software)

Quake is the future of gaming, no doubt about it. A true 3D environment shaped fully by polygons, brilliant light-sourcing, and haunting use of texture and shadow. Quake is currently the ultimate in immersive environments, and the standard by which first-person technology will be judged for a long time.

RUNNER-UP:

The Neverhood

(DreamWorks Interactive)

The Neverhood dips back into animation's infancy to bring us a game that truly reawakens the sense of wonder we enjoyed when we began playing on our PCs. The stop-frame clay animation and vivid environments are remarkable, and, like all great fantasies, The Neverhood carries you away to its own miraculous world. This game belongs on the shelf of everyone devoted to the too-often-maligned (and mistreated) art of interactive storytelling.

BEST STRATEGY GAME, REAL-TIME

Syndicate Wars

(Bullfrog/EA)

In its day, Syndicate was a trailblazing classic of the then-infant real-time-strategy genre. In our day, Syndicate Wars updates that vision and then some. Claw your way to the top of a corporate ladder in a world where the gun is truly mightier than the pen.

RUNNER-UP:

Z

(Virgin)

The Bitmap Brothers turned real-time strategy gaming inside-out with this delightful tongue-in-cheek battle between robotic armies who are as quick with an insult as they are with machine guns.

BEST STRATEGY GAME, TURN-BASED

Civilization II

(MicroProse)

Sid Meier has made fascinating games on almost every subject imaginable, but Civ II is his magnum opus. No game has ever had a greater tagline than "Build an empire to stand the test of time." Not much we'd rather do.

RUNNER-UP:

Fantasy General

(SSI)

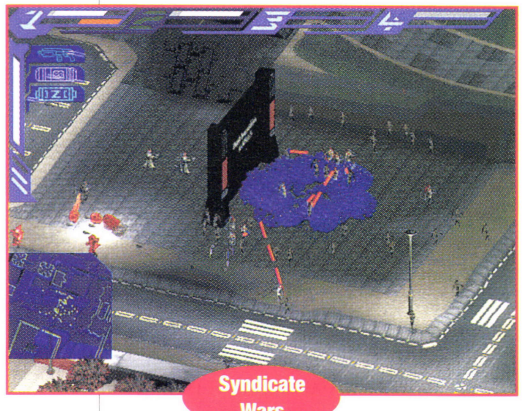
SSI's General games have leeched more hours out of hex wargamers than any creations in recent memory. The fantasy edition is the most involving incarnation yet.

BEST ADVENTURE GAME

The Pandora Directive

(Access Software)

This one has it all: gumshoes, G-men, and alien greys. Tex Murphy is back in his trenchcoated, athletic-shoed glory on the trail of the massive Roswell controversy. With a twisting, teasing storyline and impressive graphics, this adventure game flew higher than a cigar-shaped UFO.



Syndicate Wars

RUNNER-UP:

Spycraft

(Activision)

The Cold War is over, but the world is just as dangerous—which makes Spycraft as relevant as it is engrossing. Charged with thwarting a plot to throw post-Communist Russia into political chaos, you employ a fascinating array of real-world espionage tools to make the world safe for democracy. With the creative participation of former KGB head Oleg Kalugin and the late William Colby, former CIA director, Spycraft is ambitious, suspenseful, and well worth playing.

BEST ROLE-PLAYING GAME

The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

(Bethesda SoftWorks)



Daggerfall

Rumors about the death of the RPG may have been exaggerated. Just when we were digging through our stacks looking for the nostalgic warmth of Ultima IV, Bethesda finally released its rich, enormous follow-up to Elder Scrolls: Arena. With wide-open character generation and goal-setting, Daggerfall promises hundreds of hours of fresh gameplay in a challenging environment. We're stocking plenty of torches.

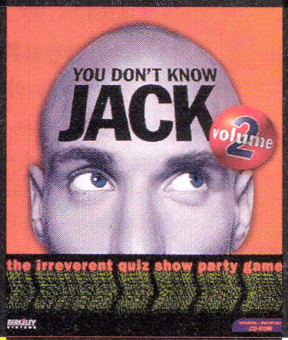


Virtual Pool from MacPlay has all the angles and shots of the real game—and then some. Features 4 great pool games, full-motion-video library, realistic physics and geometry, easy multiplayer modes, realistic 3-D perspective and graphics plus a musical jukebox.

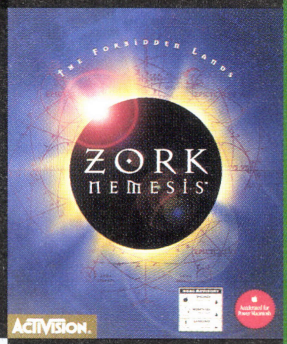


Five hundred years ago, Europe's conquering heroes pursued dreams of a new world. MacPlay's Conquest of the New World is a strategy game where you command explorers, settlers and mercenary soldiers as they discover a new world and build the ultimate nation.

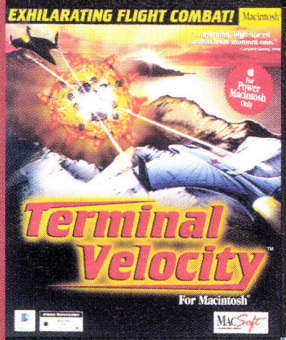
You Don't Know Jack, Volume 2, is the hilarious sequel to the original award-winning game. This Jack comes complete with 800 all-new questions, new question types, celebrity guest appearances, new features and more. From Berkeley Systems.



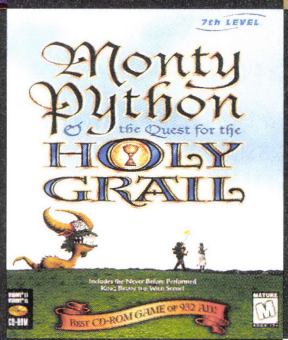
In Zork Nemesis, you're beckoned to the Forbidden Lands, a cursed world occupied only by the tortured spirits trapped there. Travel through 5 mind-bending worlds to discover the ancient secret of alchemy that will free the trapped souls from evil's grip. From Activision.



Is that the



MacSoft's Terminal Velocity offers fast 3-D texture-mapped graphics, full 360-degree flight movement and 7 weapons of extraordinary destruction as you fight your way through 9 unique planets with an awesome array of air-to-air and air-to-ground combat action.



The best CD-ROM game of 932 A.D.—Monty Python and the Quest for the Holy Grail from 7th Level, Inc. It will take you on a romp through King Arthur's England, uncovering clues, solving puzzles and playing wholesome games like "Burn the Witch" and "Spank the Virgin."

Westwood Studios' Command and Conquer takes you into a gritty, high-tech world where the art of electronic intelligence and covert surveillance reigns supreme. Where guerrilla strategies and savage combat are the norm. Muster forces and lacerate your enemies to the bone.



Tank Commander by Eidos Interactive slams you into the cockpit of an M1 Abrams tank as you test your split-second-decision skills against enemy tanks in over 25 fully textured missions. Destroy T-72, Leopard and Challenger tanks with over 7 weapons.





With its incredibly realistic flight models, 3-D photo-realistic landscapes and the use of real-world physics, Flight Unlimited re-creates the most accurate sensation of aerobatic flying ever experienced on the Macintosh. For best results, play before lunch.



Origin Systems' Wing Commander IV is one of the latest space-combat games for the Mac. Take on the role of Colonel Blair, played by Mark Hamill in breathtaking space battles and heart-pounding drama, as you fight your way through the most spectacular Wing Commander yet.

Get ready for the biggest adrenaline rush of the holiday season. We're talking new games for the Mac.® We're also talking sweaty palms. Heart-pounding exhilaration. Stomach-in-the-throat thrills—the works. And here's the best part: with thousands of titles to choose from, you may never come down from that gaming high. Piqued your interest? Good.

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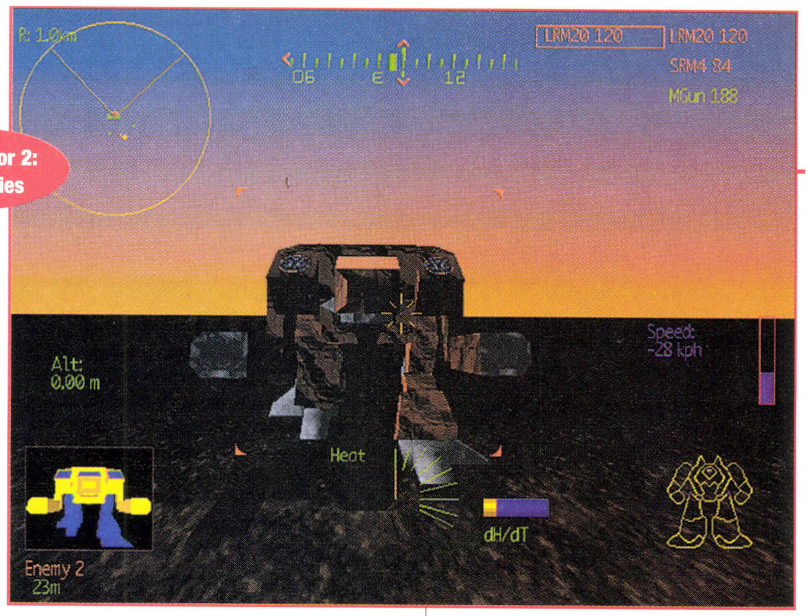
smell of chestnuts burning? Or just your neurological receptors going into overdrive?



So now you're probably wondering how to get your twitching fingers on these games. Just visit stores like CompUSA, Staples, Micro Center and Fry's Electronics. Or, flip through any Mac mail-order catalogs. Or, hop on the Net. But no matter where you go to find them, remember to look for the smiling Mac OS logo. (All great software wears this face.™) If you're ready to take your adrenal glands on the ultimate ride, visit www.macsoftware.apple.com. And learn more about games for your Macintosh® and how to find them. Of course, if you want to, you can always use a phone: **call 800-500-4862**.

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EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS
PC GAMES
·1·9·9·7·



MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries

BEST SIMULATION

Afterlife
(LucasArts)

Time waits for no man, but it's comforting knowing that heaven has such friendly and efficient administrators. As for the poor souls that end up "headed south," things get sticky real fast. Afterlife is flat-out entertaining, something fewer and fewer games are these days. Fine fun for saints and sinners alike.


AH-64D Longbow

BEST FLIGHT SIM

AH-64D Longbow
(Electronic Arts)

That's right—this year's *Top Gun* trophy goes to a craft that never gets above the hard deck. Jane's Combat Simulations' AH-64D Longbow is the most involving, you-are-there experience in the air this year. Its stunning terrain, edge-of-seat missions, and teeth-gritting gameplay were second to none (a good thing, since there are no points for...well, you know).

BEST DRIVING SIM

Grand Prix II
(MicroProse)

With its deft mix of graphic treats, sterling simulation, and down-home testosterone, Grand Prix II was the winner by several lengths. Plenty of gas in this tank for both obsessive feature-tweakers and arcade enthusiasts.

BEST COMBAT SIM

MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries
(Activision)

Expanding on its glorious MechWarrior 2 (*PC Games*' Game of the Year, 1995), Activision puts you in command of a merc outfit selling its services to the highest bidder. With new mechs, new environments, and a stepped-up 3D facelift, Mercenaries improves what was already one of gaming's most thrilling simulations.

RUNNER-UP:

Wing Commander IV
(Origin)

When they finally get around to writing the book on the pioneers of interactive entertainment, the Wing Commander series is going to fill a nice, thick chapter. The fourth installment, a lavish, well-executed space opera, carries the series forth in fine style.


Wing Commander IV

BEST SPORTS GAME

Links LS
(Access Software)

Golfers had reason to rejoice with the release of Links LS. Its stunning photorealistic courses and astoundingly real physics are sharper than anything else we've seen. We spent more time on these digital links than we did in any virtual ballpark, gridiron, rink, or stadium this year.

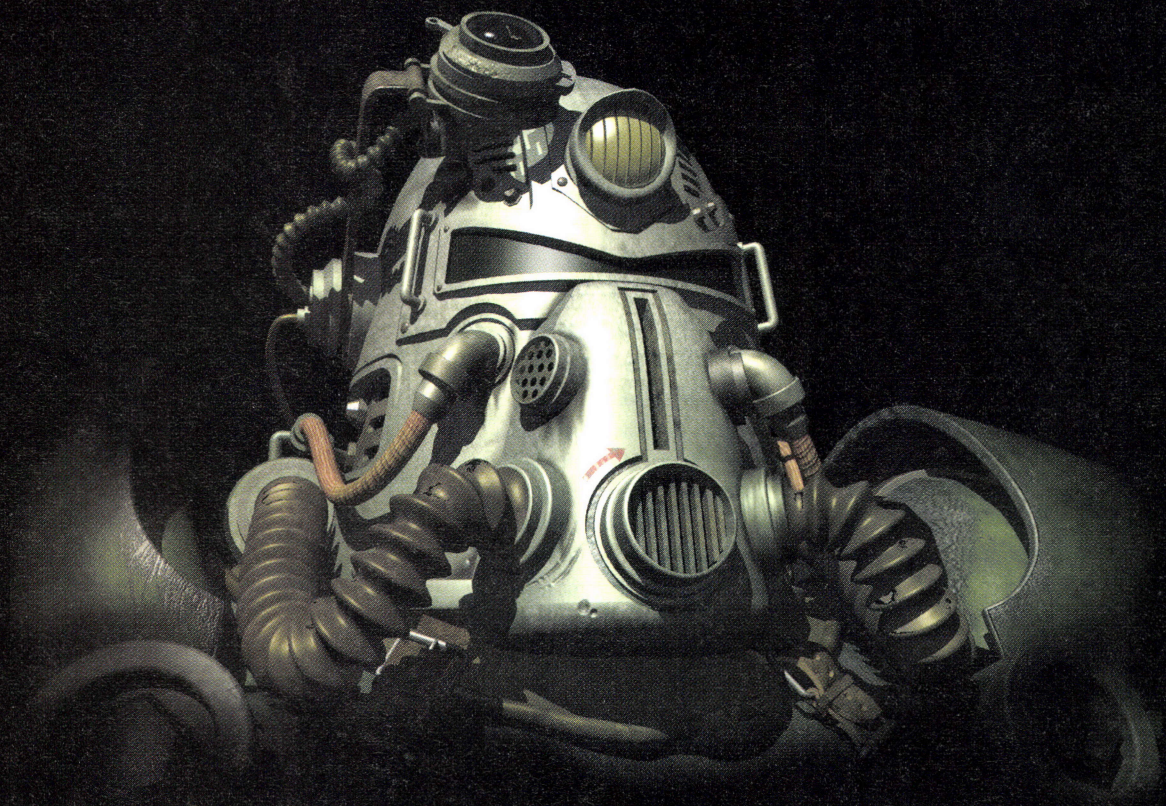

Links LS

BEST BRAIN DRAIN

Chessmaster 5000
(Mindscape)

Mindscape's Chessmaster series has long been the standard by which chess games are judged, and the newest entry checkmates the competition. Featuring a comprehensive tutorial section and a complete online gaming package, this champion's nearly unbeatable.

If you play only one real RPG this year, it will have to be...



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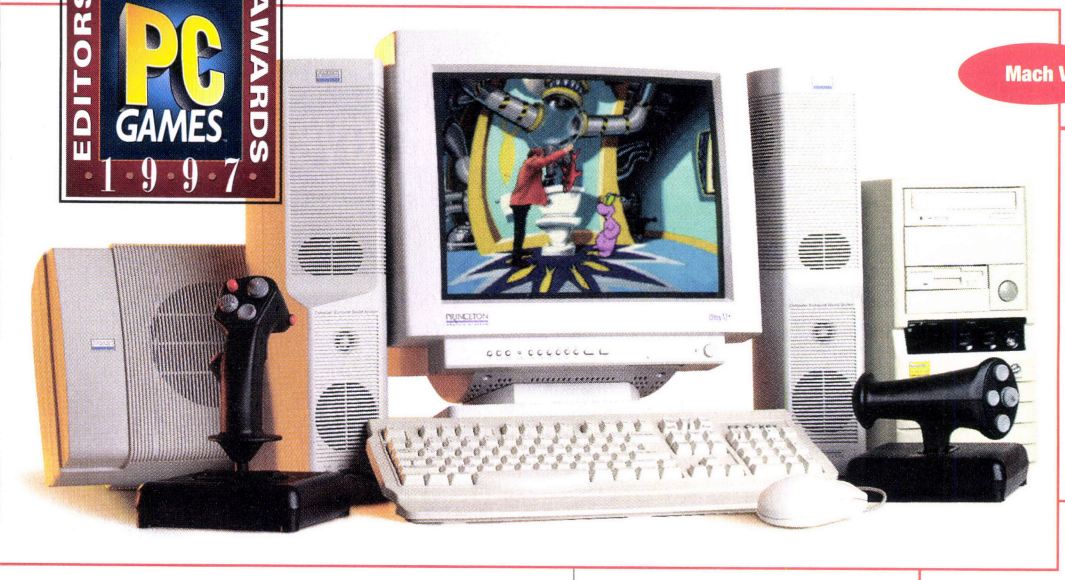
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EDITORS' CHOICE AWARDS
PC GAMES
1997



Mach V

technology should continue to sear gamer eyeballs throughout 1997 as it appears on graphics cards from Creative Labs, Sierra, Intergraph, and other hardware vendors.

BEST ONLINE GAME

Warbirds

(Interactive Creations)

Warbirds continues to be the model for what an online game should be: endlessly entertaining. Our week would be much duller without the promise of Thursday night sorties. May the wired gaming community of tomorrow be as much fun to fly as Warbirds' skies are today.

RUNNER-UP:

Multiplayer Battletech: Solaris

(Kesmai)

Kesmai/Aries' MPBS is easy to learn and fun to play...and play...and play. Better yet, it's a terrific place to "hang." From the bar where MechWarriors swap tales of battlefield slaggings to the warzones themselves, Battletech: Solaris is not just a great game, but a great community.

BEST PERIPHERAL

Gravis GrIP

(Advanced Gravis)

Have GrIP, will travel. This handy four-way gameport is a must for multiplayer gaming at the same machine. Sure, this is the age of modems and online gaming and such, but there's nothing like scoring on a breakaway goal past your buddy's supine goalie, then turning and indicting his manhood eye to eye. The GrIP is the peripheral getting the most use in our office, and we suspect that will be true for a while to come.

RUNNER-UP:

SideWinder Gamepad

(Microsoft)

While its DOS-shell compatibility is variable, the Microsoft pad is a must-have Windows 95 gaming accessory. The DOS Militia may decry Win 95 from hill to hill, but it's rapidly becoming the gaming OS of choice. The SideWinder pad is its finest peripheral.



SideWinder

BEST SYSTEM

Falcon Mach V

(Falcon Northwest)

When we pop the shrinkwrap on the latest game in our mailbin, we head straight to the Mach V to put it through its paces. Built first and foremost with gamers in mind, the Mach V is the best gaming rig we looked at this year.

BEST COMPONENT

Vérité 3D Accelerator

(Rendition)

Once you've seen a game turbocharged by the Vérité chipsetand BIOS, it's hard to go back. Rendition's technology is the best of the first-gen 3D acceleration bumper crop thus far, turning pixelated terrain into full-blown landscapes and simulated environments into something damn near reality. Though its competition is getting tough, the Vérité

RUNNER-UP:

GameLAN

(Apexx Technology)

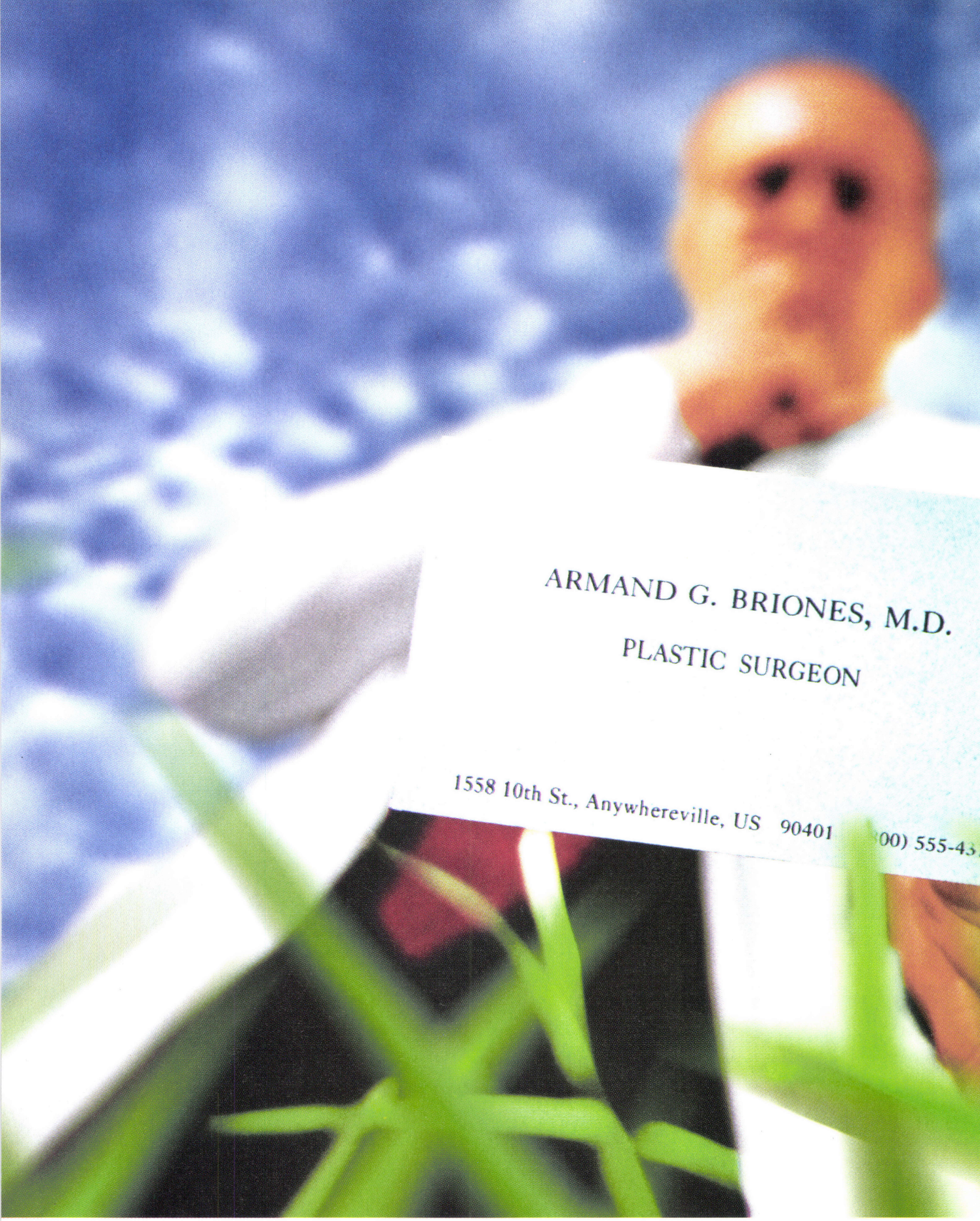
Those of us who routinely subvert office productivity by using our LANs for games have all wished we could rig the thing up at home and indulge in a weekend of War and Waste. GameLAN is a simple, relatively affordable network designed to let gamers set themselves up with a personal LAN. It's what we've used most of the year for our in-house fragfests, and its performance has been topnotch.

BREAKTHROUGH HARDWARE

SideWinder GamePad

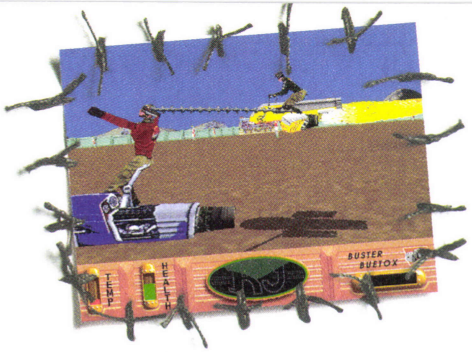
Just the facts, ma'am: it's affordable, it's user-friendly, and it's ridiculously easy to install, use, and configure for all your Win 95 games. You can daisy-chain several pads for multigaming without having multiple joystick ports. It's the perfect model of what "plug-and-play" was supposed to be all along, and destined to be the prototypical peripheral of the plug-and-play era.


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the invasion.
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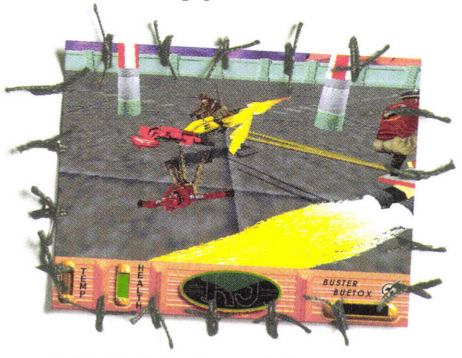


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PATIENT 33-S: Received multiple treatments for injuries sustained while participating in "Rocket War." Reconstructive surgery corrected most facial bones destroyed by repeated encounters with rockets, cement walls and pylons. Skin grafts from buttocks region replaced epidermal tissue burned off by jet exhaust.



PATIENT 4-0: Treated for severe lacerations received when he was knocked off his rocket by competitor's cable while "Rocket Racing." Rhinoplasty and ear reconstruction were also necessary, as patient's face was smashed repeatedly against the ground and walls while traveling in excess of 100 mph.



PATIENT 98-B: Treated for massive head trauma suffered after ramming his rocket into an exploding ball while playing "Rocket Ball." The accident completely welded his eye sockets shut and tore 90% of the skin off his face. Needless to say, this was no ordinary "lift and tuck."

Rocket Jockey™

ROCKETS AND JOCKEYS.

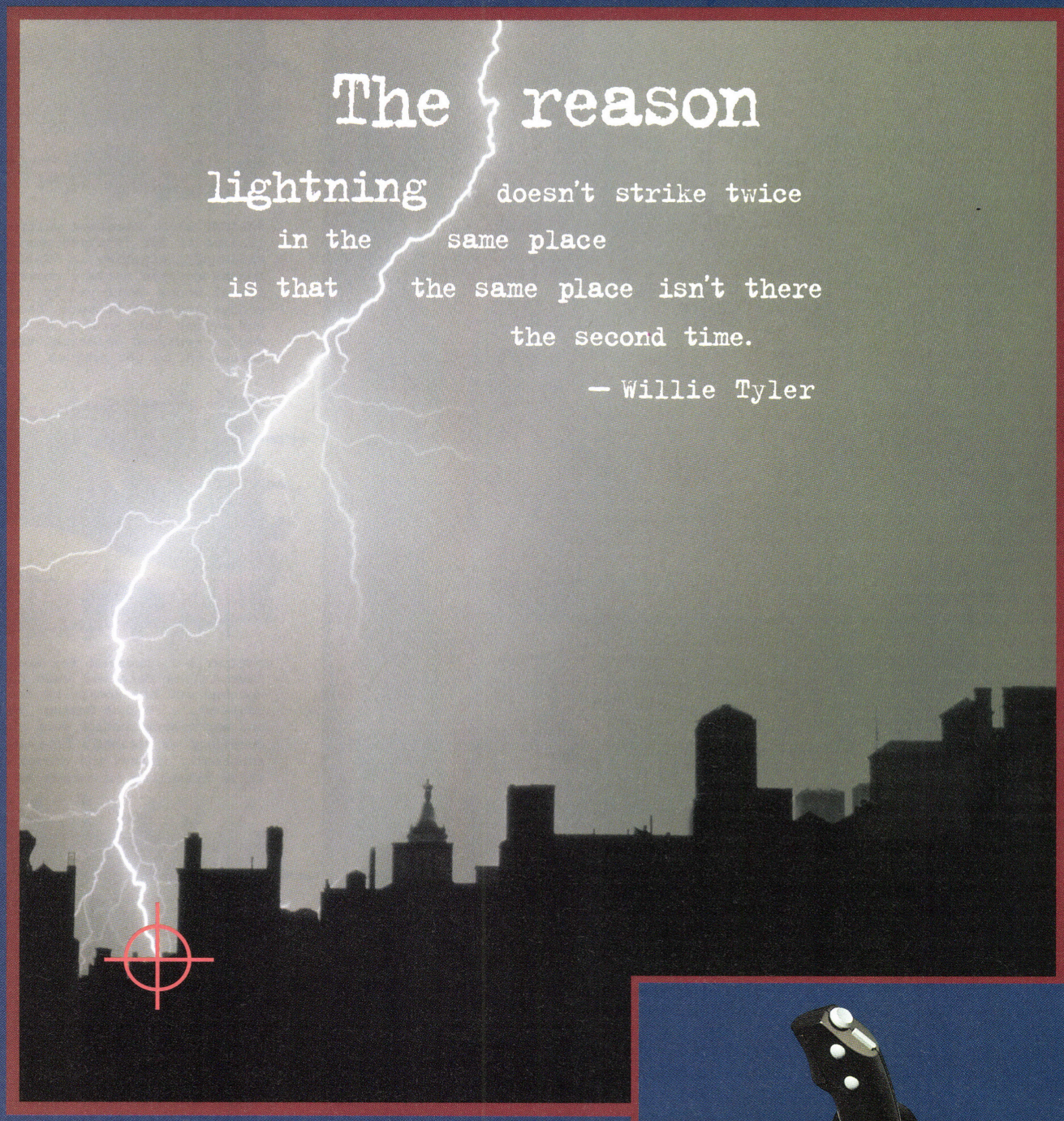
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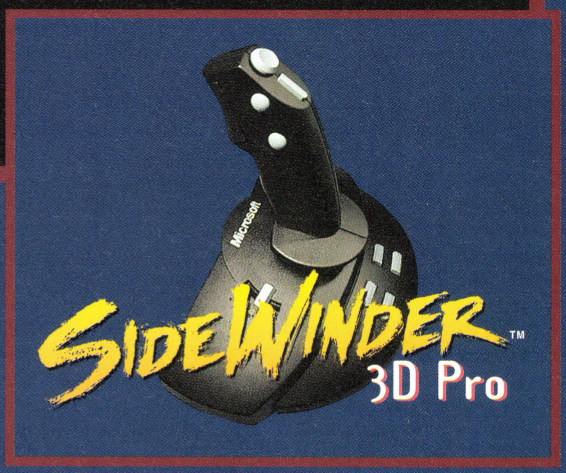
Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



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Microsoft

Where do you want to go today? **www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/**

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THE 3rd ANNUAL Murphy Awards



Computer games aren't spontaneously generated in a Toys "R" Us landfill. They were never the contents of Pandora's box. And they aren't a neo-communist plot to reduce the intelligence of American youth to the moron level. They're the inspired and dedicated work of thousands of talented people whose main goal in life (after retiring wealthy at 38) is to bring you involving, provocative, polished, and revolutionary interactive entertainment.

To recognize these human dynamos behind the high-tech, *PC Games* created the Murphy Awards (named after Tex Murphy, one of the first live-video characters in a computer game). In contrast to our product-oriented Editors' Choice Awards, the Murphys honor the people who continue to make computer games one of the most remarkable creative pursuits of the 20th century.



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

id Software

This gang has brought American office productivity to a screeching halt with each successive release, and with the departure of some key people to pursue individual projects, this is the perfect time to salute id Software for igniting the 3D action revolution (not to mention the shareware distribution model).

We remember Commander Keen, when id was first tapping at the door, and the shotgun blast that was Doom. Quake's technology will be the first-person standard for a long time to come. We have a feeling these boys aren't done writing the industry's future quite yet, so to those staying aboard at id and to those venturing to new horizons, our deepest thanks and congratulations. And from network managers across America, curses without end.



BEST MALE ACTOR

Nobody



BEST FEMALE ACTOR

Nobody

After a round of full-motion-video games mostly notable more for their technology than their entertainment value, the industry saw a backlash that resulted in a lightweight year for video-driven games. Is FMV dead? We don't think so. Developers just need to re-evaluate the role that conventional storytelling and acting should play in an interactive environment.

Still, a slow FMV year meant that no performers jumped off the screen to capture our imagination. On the upside, we've already seen a couple of early FMV contenders that suggest 1997 will be a much better year for digitized acting.

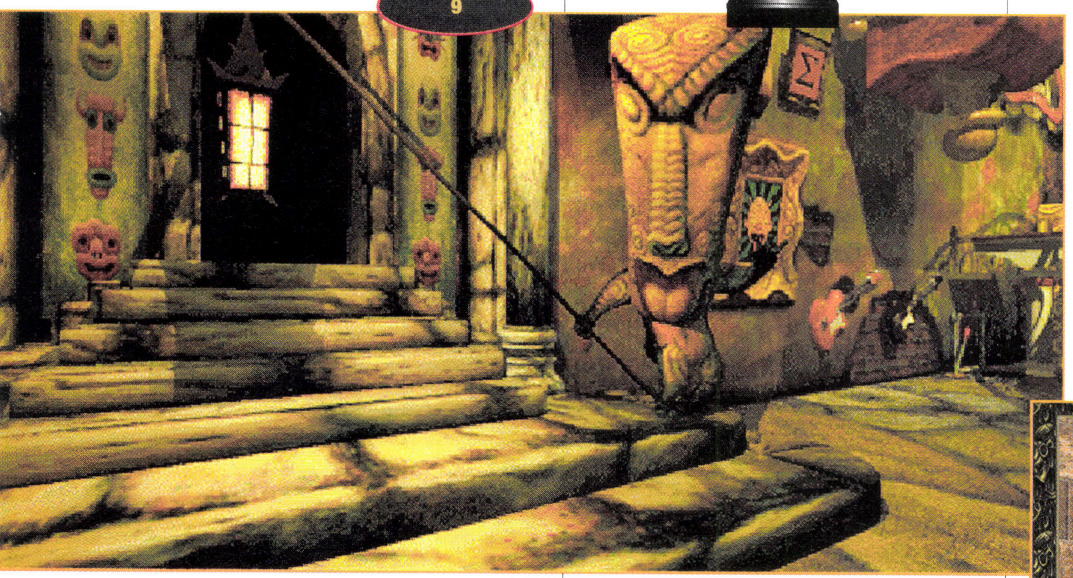


BEST USE OF LIVE-ACTION FOOTAGE

Chris Jones, Adrian Carr, Aaron Conners
The Pandora Directive

As our awards' namesake, Tex, Chris Jones didn't exactly stretch his acting chops in this

sequel to Under A Killing Moon. Still, the full-motion video in The Pandora Directive—created in collaboration with director Carr and co-designer Conners—was the best of the year's otherwise so-so entries.





BEST STORY

Chris Jones, Aaron Conners
The Pandora Directive

No sooner are the trenchcoat and slouch hat comfortably in place than Tex Murphy finds himself in the middle of a frightening web of intrigue. From rain-slicked city streets to the deep abyss of an alien tomb, The Pandora Directive teases, grabs, and satisfies. It's an ode to the benefit that good writing can bring to a game.



BEST ART

Mark Ryden
9

If anyone doubts that computer games lack the visual sophistication of other art forms, let them look at 9. Ryden's art direction of this sumptuous adventure spawned images of audacious creativity. Who needs photorealism when fantasy looks this good?

BEST MUSIC

Terry Taylor
The Neverhood

This finely crafted game moves to the playful beat of a wonderful ragtime soundtrack. Like so many other trends that The Neverhood bucks, its music seems decades out of place for the interactive era. So what? Taylor's ingenious retro score creates an audio environment that perfectly complements the rich fantasy of Klaymen's quest.

BEST VOICE-OVER

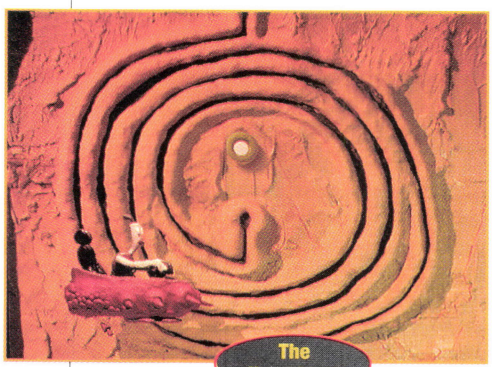
Jon St. John
Duke Nukem 3D

Granted, the guy didn't have to do a lot of work in providing the voice of Duke Nukem; but what he did was priceless and peerless—it'll inform the vocabulary of action gamers for years to come. Duke's riotous deadpan is the spark of life that separates Duke from the mass of 3D shooters released this year. "Cool."

BEST ANIMATION

Eric Ciccone, Mike Dietz, Douglas TenNapel
The Neverhood

Clay animation has rarely looked better on any screen, let alone a monitor. Designer TenNapel and animators Ciccone and Dietz (supported by art colleagues Mark and Tim Lorenzen, Brian Belfield, and Edward Schofield, along with armature designer Peter Marinello) handcrafted every frame of The Neverhood, and it's dazzling.



BEST FRIEND

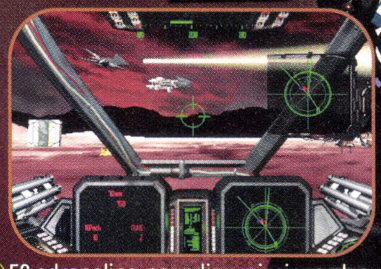
Jennifer Aniston
Steven Spielberg's Director Chair

No contest on this one.

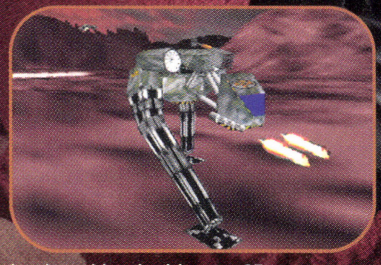
IN THE FUTURE, YOU DON'T REBUILD. YOU RELOAD.

"This game is hot! It takes the best and combines them into one neat package."
-Computer Games Strategy Plus

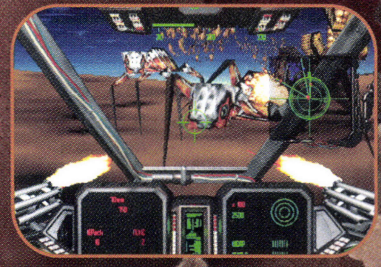
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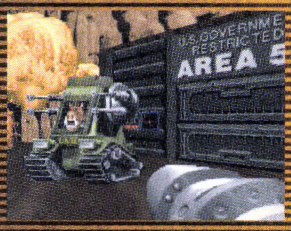
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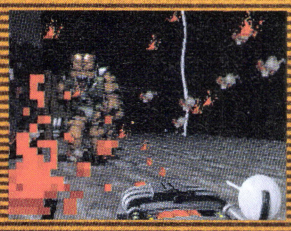
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ONLY A FOOL TRIES TO SOLVE PROBLEMS WITH HANDGUNS. LARGE CALIBER AUTOMATICS DO THE JOB MUCH MORE QUICKLY.

DUKE NUKEM 3D PLUTONIUM PAK. COME GET SOME MORE.

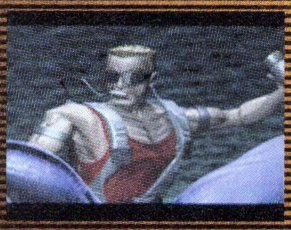
An all new episode with new levels, new weapons and new aliens to splat, from the original creators. Full version of Duke Nukem 3D required. If you don't already have the full version of Duke Nukem 3D, crawl out from under your rock and buy the Duke Nukem 3D Atomic Edition.















- **Explore 11 new levels, several based on current hit movies**
- **See all new enemies get their butts kicked by Duke's steel-toed boots**
- **Smell steaming entrails as Duke's new microwave cannon fries and explodes those alien bastards**
- **Hear aliens squeal as Duke *aborts* their entire race in one of two hilarious and controversial new cinematic scenes**
- **Learn more about Duke's philosophy as he cracks dozens of new one-liners (Duke Talk)**
- **Exciting new special effects, including deadly lightning and new features such as simulated multiplayer games (against up to 7 other Dukes) on a single computer**
- **Other Duke-approved stuff: Duke Win95 themes, 5 Duke Screen savers, 6 Duke jigsaw puzzles and Image Carousel**

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3D REALMS™

www.3drealms.com

TEN™ The Total Entertainment Network

www.ten.net

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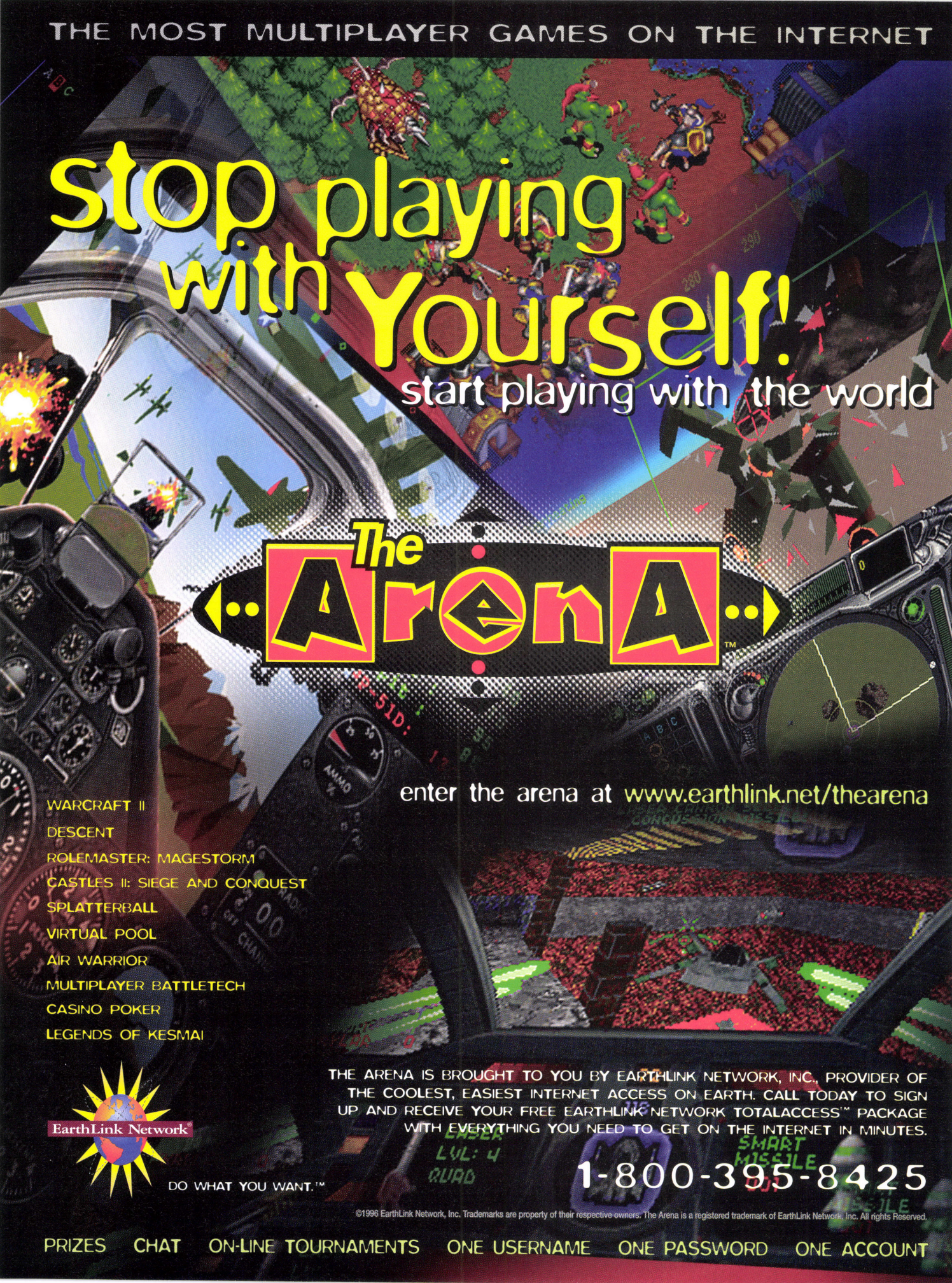
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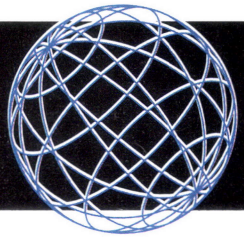
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Gaming Over the Internet



By Jason D'Aprile

How do the various Net gaming options stack up? Here's a firsthand look at TEN, Mplayer, and Engage—and Kali, a hack that's many a gamer's delight.

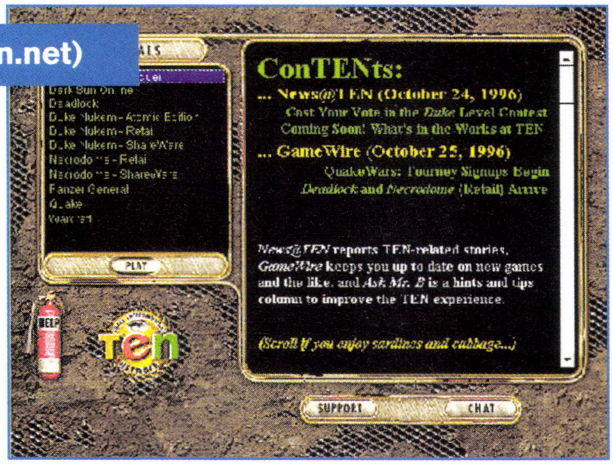
Well, we finally have a truly useful reason for the existence of the Internet—blowing up our friends, neighbors and total strangers all over the Net. For any hard-core gamer, that sure beats Web surfing (or crawling, really) and IRC chat.

Both TEN and Mplayer—the two most high-profile Net-based gaming services—are officially moving out of the testing stage and becoming full-fledged Internet gaming services. So finally, gaming over the Net has hit the mainstream, with plenty more to come. But with the choices you have right now and other new services approaching, what's right for you?

There are a number of questions you need to answer before you decide on one source for your Internet gaming. Which service has the most games that appeal to you? As important or even more so, what type of connection do you have? For instance, I live out in the country, several hundred miles away from a major city, so my Internet choices are not exactly striking, but most gamers probably have several different Internet service providers (ISPs) that they could use. Or maybe you have an online service like AOL or Prodigy. For the latter, you really have only one choice right now—Engage, which should be appearing on both services by the time you read this. One more question: How much do the services cost?

ISP users will have to come to grips with the ideas of latency, pings, and lag (for in-depth information on these concepts, see David Gerding's article in this month's Technobabble). If your connection to the Net is clean and solid, all the services should work quite well for you most of the time, and you stand in what might be referred to as an "ideal situation." But if your ISP is a little on the spotty-and-gritty side at times (and most are at some point), then you get to see how clever those programmers in the back room really are.

The Total Entertainment Network (www.ten.net)



OVERVIEW: Total Entertainment Network—more familiarly, TEN—is the first widespread, well-known commercial Internet gaming service, notable not so much for its high-profile marketing as for Duke Nukem 3D. TEN's exclusive five-year deal with 3D Realms assures the service a top spot among hard-core action fans and gives it an enviable ace up its sleeve, along with some of the most impressive, big-name multiplayer games of any of the services. TEN also has the AD&D Dark Suns role-playing gaming world, with a full one-year exclusive to it.

TEN works with current Internet providers to minimize latency, and moves servers closer to users by having three main servers in different parts of the country (the East and West Coast areas, with the middle ground being taken up by the Chicago server). TEN isn't quite as latency-friendly as Mplayer, however. When you log on and enter different game rooms, you'll have to contend with Mr. Bandwidth, the icon used to represent all the Internet gaming concerns. Mr. Bandwidth will tell you how good your connection is based on a few criteria, and if it doesn't quite cut it, he won't let you play. TEN offers direct-dial numbers throughout the country, but charges almost a dollar an hour extra for using them (which should put a noticeable smile on Mr. Bandwidth's little alien face, not to mention TEN's investors).

When you do get a solid connection, however, good game quality is usually fairly easy to find. Sure, playing Duke over TEN isn't going to match the speed and quality of an office network, but most of the time the playability is quite good. In the future, TEN will be looking to expand its front-end interface by embedding a full-fledged Web browser in the software and, eventually, moving to make the interface take advantage of Internet-specific technologies such as Java to improve performance and features.

CURRENT GAMES: Duke Nukem 3D, Quake, Deadlock, Dark Suns, Necrodome, Warcraft, Terminal Velocity, Panzer General, Command and Conquer.

UPCOMING TITLES: Shadow Warrior, Blood, Prey, Big Red Racing, Total Mayhem, Confirmed Kill, Deathtrap Dungeon, SimCity 2000, Falcon 4.0, Top Gun, Silencer, Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games, CivNet, WizBall

RATES: The first 25,000 TEN customers will be able to take advantage of special half-price charter rates. There are two rate plans:

Hourly Rate Plan: $4.95 monthly fee (regular rate: $9.95 monthly fee). Includes 5 hours a month. $0.95 per additional hour (regular rate: $1.95 per hour) and an additional $0.95 per hour when connecting via a TEN local-access number (provided by the Concentric Network). *Flat-Rate Plan:* $14.95 monthly fee (regular rate: $29.95 monthly fee) provides unlimited hours (plus an additional $0.95 per hour if connecting via a TEN local-access number).

PLUSES: The 3D Realms deal (which includes Duke 3D), plus the overall amount of new high-profile games coming to the service. Dark Suns Online is one of the very few graphics-based RPGs on the Net, and its AD&D-based system/world is one of the best known in the gaming community.

MINUSES: TEN is noticeably more finicky than any of the other services about latency issues. As a result, those with Internet connections that have a tendency to be spotty are going to have a hard time with Duke, Quake, and other fast-action games (and TEN tends to fall back on its pay-by-the-hour direct-connect numbers to make up for it). Given the number of different ISPs throughout the country, this is a big problem—one that TEN will either have to deal with very soon or risk losing potential customers. Also, the non-charter rates are rather expensive, especially when you add them to the cost of your ISP subscription. And TEN's social interface is far more basic than those of its competition.

Mplayer (www.mplayer.com)



OVERVIEW: Mplayer doesn't have quite as impressive a list of coming attractions as TEN, but it has a number of advantages in terms of user-friendliness. Rather than bothering you with a Mr. Bandwidth-like restrictive entity, Mplayer simply marks gaming rooms that your connection is unfit for. And all of Mplayer's game servers reside on PSInet's Internet backbone. "We use the advanced features of the Internet, like frame relay, to [send data more directly to Mpath servers]," says Paul Matteucci, Mpath's president and CEO. "That decreases the latency. Plus, we create permanent virtual circuits—all of the game packets are tagged with priority so that they don't have to wait in line at a router behind e-mail or a file download."

Mplayer also has a more cohesive social environment. You choose the game you want to play and click to go to its specific server; from there, you either wait in the main lobby and chat, enter a room that's already been created, or create a room yourself. Once you've made a room, you can lock it, then invite members in with Mplayer's "pager"—much like a private message in a chat room. Also, within these rooms, you can use your PC's microphone to actually send voice chat. (Right now, only MechWarrior 2 allows the use of this feature during gameplay; press the Scroll Lock to talk.)

For the most part, Mplayer games run exceptionally well. Action games like MechWarrior 2 play very smoothly, even with a less-than-sterling connection. Yet, most users are found in one of two places: the Quake server or Command and Conquer. C&C runs great most of the time, and Quake usually runs well.

CURRENT GAMES: Quake, Command and Conquer, C&C: Covert Operations, Warcraft, Terminal Velocity (shareware only), MechWarrior 2 (Win 95 version)

UPCOMING TITLES: Diablo, War Wind, Panzer General (online only), Deadlock, Battleship, Big Red Racing, Havoc, Monopoly, Q-Ball (Quake modification exclusive to Mplayer), Risk, Scrabble, SimCity 2000 Network Edition

RATES: Mpath Interactive's Mplayer is offering limited-time charter rates to everyone who signs up by Jan. 31, 1997. Basic pricing for charter members is $7.95 for 5 hours, $.99 for each additional hour. Charter price for unlimited usage is $19.95 per month or $199.95 for a year. Standard pricing begins Feb. 1, 1997; the rates are as follows: $9.95 for 5 hours per month ($1.95 each additional hour), $19.95 for 15 hours a month ($1.25 each additional hour), $29.95 a month for unlimited access, and $299.95 for 12 months of unlimited access. All members will receive 10 free hours when they sign up for the service.

PLUSES: Mplayer deals with latency issues very well and has a user-friendly, social air to it. Also important is the fact that Mplayer has a live, online customer-support server, so you always know where to go for help. MechWarrior 2, C&C, Quake, War Wind, and Diablo are all solid, higher-profile Internet games for the service, and I generally found Quake to run better over Mplayer than on TEN. You could probably get a better game on a dedicated Quake server if everyone had a great connection, but on Mplayer you won't be bothered with any of the technical work yourself.

MINUSES: Since action games are really the cash cows of this market, TEN's 3D Realms deal will tend to overshadow what looks to be a steady flow of Mplayer games, most of which are middle-range titles. That means Mplayer is going to have to get some seriously attractive exclusives, and soon. As with TEN, the non-charter pricing plan is rather expensive as well.

battle.net (www.battle.net)

CURRENT GAMES: Diablo, Starcraft

Much like Microsoft's Gaming Zone (see page 79), battle.net is simply a place on the Internet to play the games of one particular company. But since the company is Blizzard and the games are Diablo and Starcraft, battle.net is sure to be one of the most popular sites for some time to come. What it is, essentially, is a grouping site. Come to play Diablo and the server automatically matches you up with players who have good connections in relation to you. battle.net will be a free service and will be shipping with Diablo.

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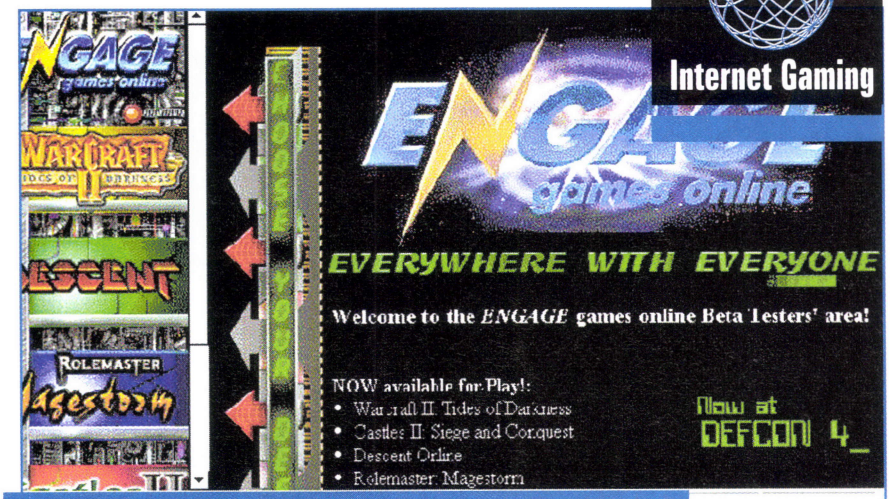
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Engage (www.gamesonline.com)

OVERVIEW: Engage has two aces in its hole: exclusive access to Interplay titles, and exclusive access to the wildly popular Warcraft II. Plus, Engage is being designed to be easily accessible—it won't just be on the Internet, but AOL and Prodigy as well.

As far as latency issues, Engage president Jeff Leibowitz says: "We're generally pretty comfortable at anything under a second. The services usually give us anywhere from 300 to 800 milliseconds in latency, and all of our games play very, very well in that space, so we don't really need a traditional low-latency solution, although we are working with the Concentric Network for people who do want truly low-latency systems."

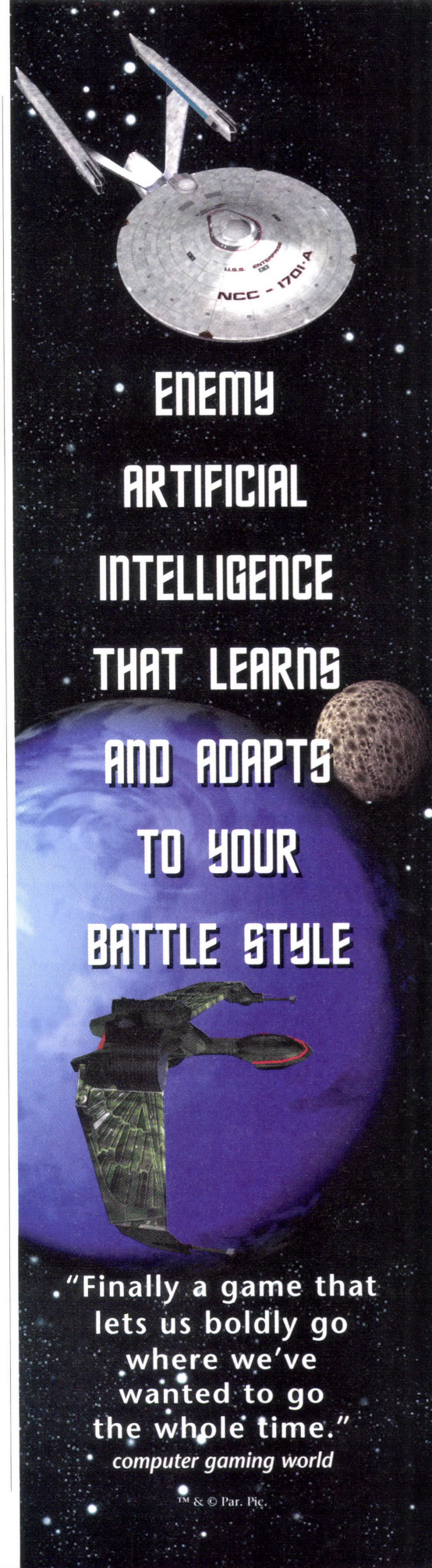
Descent and Rolemaster: Magestorm, the two Engage titles I tested over the Internet, both played great, with virtually no latency problems at all. Working with AOL and Prodigy, however, has caused some problems due to the fact that both services are essentially chat-based, so Engage's launch for the two has been delayed while certain latency issues are resolved. When it is launched, though, Engage will likely be integrated into the overall interface of these online services. Of course, until the new Internet rates are set, you'll still be playing at the services' normal connection rates (AOL gamers can take advantage of the new flat rate of $18.95 per month, though).

Engage will be broader than the other Net gaming services in terms of its social structure, with things like the Human

Microsoft's The Gaming Zone (www.zone.com)

CURRENT GAMES: Various card and board games, Hellbender, Monster Truck Madness, Close Combat, and any future Internet-playable games from Microsoft

The same concept as battle.net, the Zone is mainly a place to play the new Internet-compatible Microsoft games. Go to the Zone's Web site, click on the game you want to play (both the full and trial versions have their own servers), and you'll find yourself at a chat room where you can join or create games to play. The site automatically tells you the quality of your connection by putting a colored dot above the player listing—if it's green, you're all set, yellow is middle of the road, and red is a definite no way. It's all very simple, but doesn't always work right yet. Still, it's a smart step in the right direction, and Microsoft has expressed a strong commitment to making sure the Zone improves and grows. This matching service is, of course, completely free, but you need Microsoft's Internet Explorer to play.



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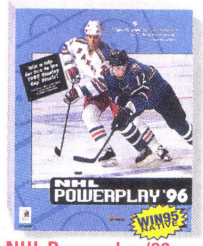
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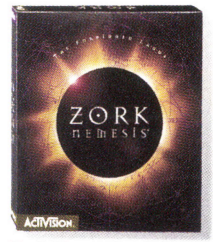
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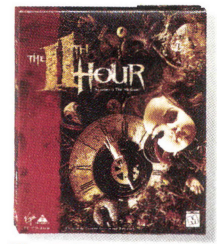
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Social Studies: Building An Online Community

One of the major focuses of online gaming services, aside from the games, is the idea of bringing more social interaction onboard. All three services feel that this aspect of multiplayer gaming is absolutely paramount to their success of its service. So what is each one doing about it?

TEN was initially focusing on games with only utilitarian chat rooms, but has since added Quake clans and ranking systems (like Mplayer), online contests, editorial content in its Datasphere section, and even user-content forums. TEN will be expanding the social aspects of the Dark Suns game by adding things such as guild rooms and "trading" posts for game-item swapping. Also, much like Mplayer has now, TEN will add the option for players to create their own chat rooms and expand on the chatting options.

Engage obviously has major plans concerning the social aspects of its service. "[We] feel that [the social interaction element] is equal to or more important than the games," president Jeff Leibowitz comments. "Community is really what it's all about. When you put a game online it becomes a magnet for social interaction. Over 50 percent of the traffic on game networks has traditionally been chat, so those kinds of elements are perhaps the critical elements of what makes for a successful game service. Of course, if you pull away the games, the chat rooms won't be as popular, so they're symbiotic.

"It's kind of like the feature-film industry in that this will be a largely hit-driven business," Leibowitz says. "So, you do need the hits. On the other hand, you need a nice 'theater' for people to see those 'movies' in. If you have a really unattractive, not-fun-to-be-in theater, people won't go; they'll go to somebody else's and they may even skip going to a movie they want to see because your theater is unappealing. Having a nice environment for the top content is really what we'll focus on."

Mplayer plans to expand by adding voice chat to the pager function to create something like a private phone booth, as well as generally improving its interface. "Our goal here is to have technology for communication, then places like chat rooms to communicate," explains CEO Paul Matteucci. "And then to have excuses to communicate, which requires the most creativity. You have to build all of these [aspects] into the service for people to build their own community online." —JD'A

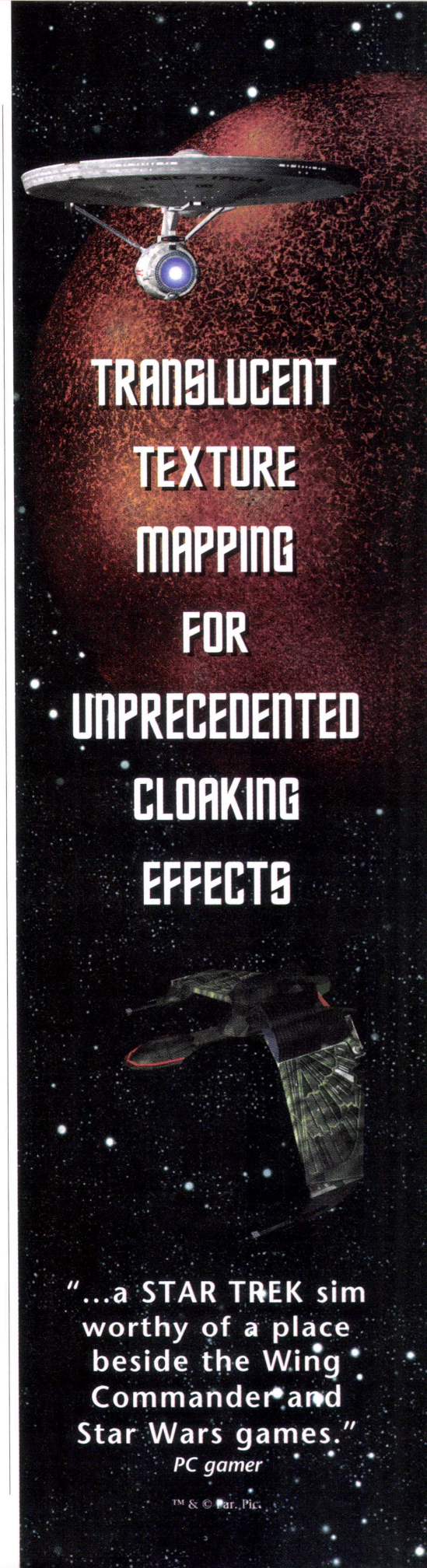
Bean Café (actor Michael Keaton is actually a main backer of this "cyber-café" chat room), comedy-based entertainment at The Improv, and simulated gambling at Caesar's Palace Virtual Casino. Engage is also broadening the role-playing-game field with its original Rolemaster series, based on the Iron Crown Enterprise game system. The first of these, Magestorm, is a Doom-style shooter where you create a wizard character and try to take over pools of power and destroy the power centers of the other mages, all the while gaining experience levels and new spells.

SCHEDULED GAMES: Descent Online, Descent Into Undermountain, Castles 2, BattleChess: 4000, Rolemaster: The Bladelands, Total Control Football, Caesar's Palace Virtual Casino, Warcraft II, Rolemaster: Magestorm, Splatterball, The Improvisation Online, U.S. Chess Federation, Human Beans Café, Shattered Steel, Slipstream 5000, Billboard Live!, AD&D: Dragon Dice.

RATES: No extra charge for playing through AOL and Prodigy, but as of now, the charge for directly playing through the Internet is described as "competitive" (expect somewhere under $2.50 an hour). A full-fledged launch campaign will start in January, but the service should be fully functional by the end of November, with 10 games by the end of the year and 1 to 2 new games each month.

PLUSES: An impressive lineup of games, especially with Warcraft II and Descent Online, in addition to plenty of original titles like Magestorm. Interplay's steady flow of multiplayer-ready games will be exclusive to Engage and ensure that the service will grow. The games that I had a chance to test—Descent Online and Magestorm—ran nearly perfect, and this was before even the official beta-testing period.

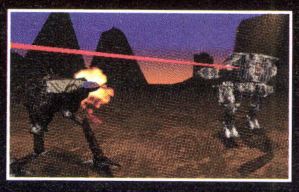
MINUSES: The Internet rates haven't been determined yet, but is it really going to be cost-effective to play over AOL or Prodigy even if using Engage won't cost you extra? Engage's "all things to all users" ideology may not work entirely to its benefit. There is such a thing as spreading yourself too thinly, and it's open to speculation whether people really want to spend their time interacting with each other in chat-only environments when they could be interacting in games.



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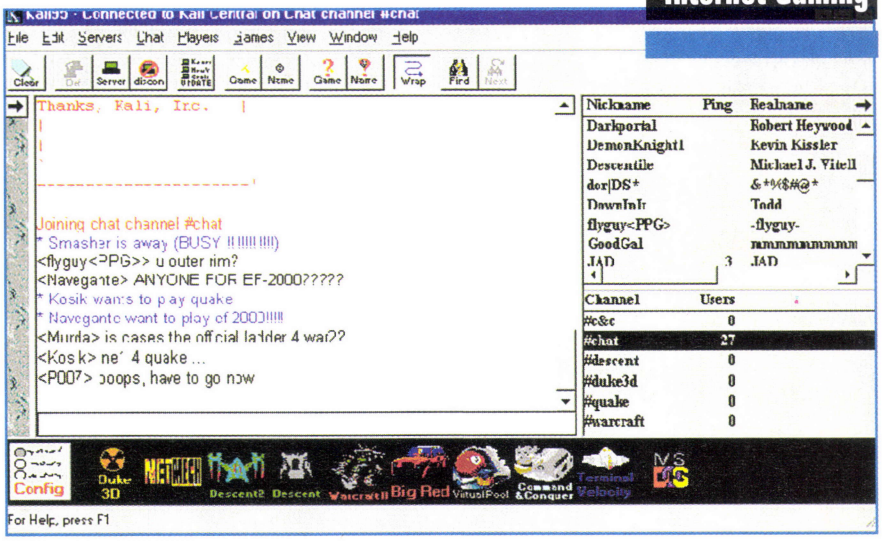
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Kali (www.axxis.com/kali)



OVERVIEW: Kali is an IPX emulator, not a service like TEN and the others. It's a little program that enables your Internet connection to fool a game into thinking that it is hooked up to an IPX network. The reason why Kali is a great thing for gamers who can use it is that most MPG games have an IPX network mode for multiplay. That's not to say that Kali will run all of them—it won't. But it will enable you to play a varied selection, as its games list suggests.

Simply download the software from the Kali site, pay the creator of Kali, Jay Cotton, a $20 shareware fee, and that's it—no more fees. There are three versions of Kali: KaliDOS, Kali95, and a Macintosh version. The downside of Kali, and the inherent advantage of services like TEN and Mplayer, is that it simply isn't all that user-friendly. You have to manually keep track of ping times for the server, yourself, and the other players, along with proper game execution and various other things that the services do automatically. Also, Kali servers are essentially general servers (there are very few servers for specific games), so you have to search around for people who want to play the same game you do. Also, some major games just don't run all that well—Duke is far better on TEN, for example.

CURRENT GAMES: Warcraft and Warcraft II, Descent and Descent II, Command and Conquer, Deadlock, MissionForce: CyberStorm, Duke Nukem 3D, NetMech (MechWarrior 2), MW2: Mercenaries, Big Red Racing, and many other IPX games

PLUSES: That $20 one-time fee makes Kali one of the best deals on the Internet. Lots of games work over Kali, and the program has gained an international community of players. Depending on the game, performance can be as good as the other services, and Kali's function as a straightforward IPX emulator, along with its low-key, fairly non-commercial existence, makes the need for licensees and marketing unnecessary.

MINUSES: Kali is definitely not for everyone. The technical aspects of Internet gaming that the other services try to keep in the background tend to come right to the forefront—especially latency issues—and tech support is handled through e-mail only. Also, Kali95 and KaliMac are still in the beta stages, and are likely to be for some time. Not all games are supported, particularly DirectX games; however, Cotton says there will be native Direct X support down the road.

Internet Gaming

***PC Games* tested the various gaming services using a Pentium 133 with 24MB of RAM; the connection was over a 28.8Kbps modem. All tests were done via the EarthLink Network through a link in West Virginia.**



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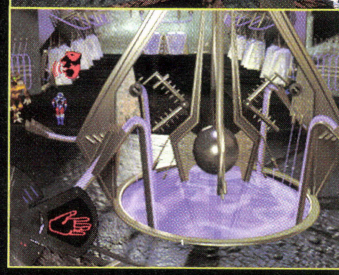
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(id Software; 800-434-2637; DOS CD; $45)

AH-64D Longbow

For serious chopper-sim aficionados, Longbow's a must-buy. (Origin Systems; 800-245-4525; DOS CD; $59.95)

Afterlife

Outrageous humor and stunning graphics make this SimCity clone heavenly. (LucasArts; 800-782-7927; DOS/Win 95 CD; $54.95)

Bad Mojo

Love it or hate it, you've never played an adventure game as a cockroach before. (Pulse Entertainment; 310-264-5579; Win CD; $54.95)

Civilization II

A wonderfully compelling upgrade of the strategic conquest classic. (MicroProse; 800-695-4263; Win CD; $48.99)

Close Combat

A revolutionary tactical-level military sim that's reason enough to have Win 95. (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; Win 95 CD; $44.95)

Duke Nukem 3D

Quake's rival for the top first-person action shooter—especially in multiplayer mode. (FormGen; 800-367-6436; DOS CD; $39.99)

Fantasy General

The newest entry in the General series offers solid wargaming from start to finish. (SSI; 800-601-7529; DOS CD; $50)

Hind

Russia's prime attack helicopter takes to the skies. Fitted with awesome firepower and impressive realism, it's a must-have for combat-sim fans. (Interactive Magic; 800-699-4263; DOS/Win 95 CD; $49.95)

Links LS

As close to a real game of golf as you can get—provided you've got a speedy Pentium. (Access Software; 800-800-4880; DOS/Win 95 CD; $79.95)

The Pandora Directive

Tex Murphy returns in this engaging sequel to Under A Killing Moon. (Access Software; 800-800-4880; DOS/Win 95 CD; $49.95)

Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri

Awesome sound effects and a compelling story help make Terra Nova the most immersive combat experience around. (Virgin; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $59.95)

Star Control 3

This long-awaited sequel is sure to please strategy fans. (Accolade; 800-245-7744; Win 95/DOS CD; $49.95)

Toonstruck

Join Christopher Lloyd and a cast of crazies for hilarious adventure with superb production valves. (Virgin; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $54.95)

Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness and Beyond the Dark Portal

A classic strategy game, made even better with 24 new scenarios in the add-on disc. (Blizzard Entertainment; 800-953-7669; DOS CD; Tides of Darkness, $50; Beyond the Dark Portal, $30)

Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom

Everything you could ask for in a space sim—and then some. (Origin Systems; 800-245-4525; DOS CD; $55)

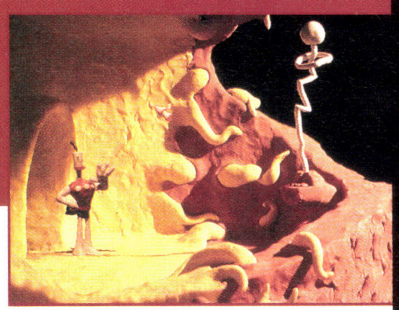
Z

Real-time wargaming with excellent AI and lots of humor. (Virgin; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $54.99–$59.99)

THE NEVERHOOD

This clay animation adventure is an artistic masterpiece.

(DreamWorks Interactive; 310-234-7000; Win 95 CD; $54.95)



Zork: Nemesis

The latest Zork once again redefines adventure gaming. (Activision; 800-477-3650; DOS/Win 95 CD; $49.95)

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How We Rate Games

***PC Games* uses a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone who's gone to school knows what our grades mean without resorting to an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas.**

Gameplay: How good are the game's interface and control scheme, and how much fun is it to play? The most important element of the game.

Getting Started: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are needed before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

Graphics: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they match the game?

Sound Check: How good are the game's sound effects and musical score, and how well do they fit the game?

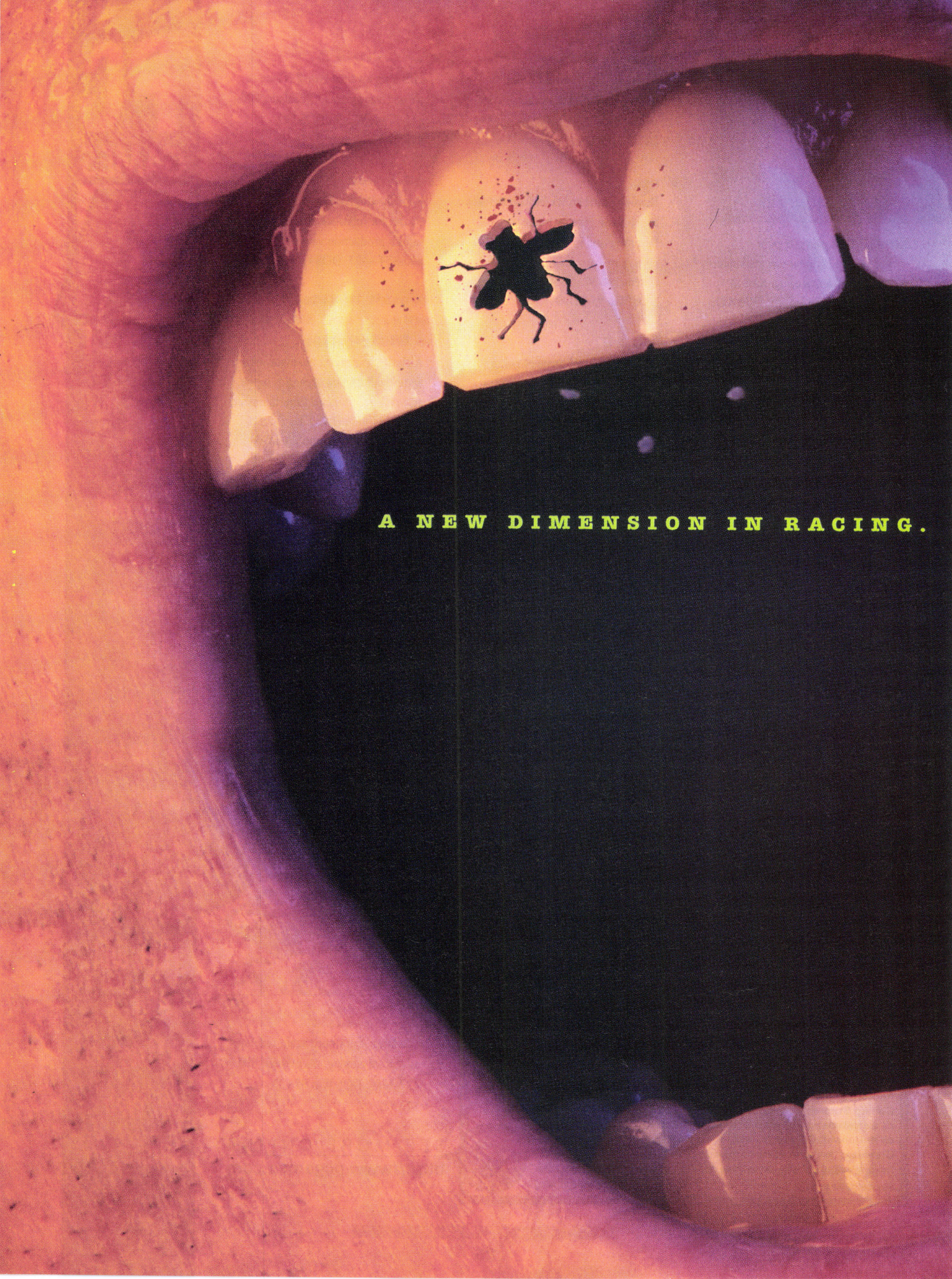
Overall Grade: Taking these factors into account, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

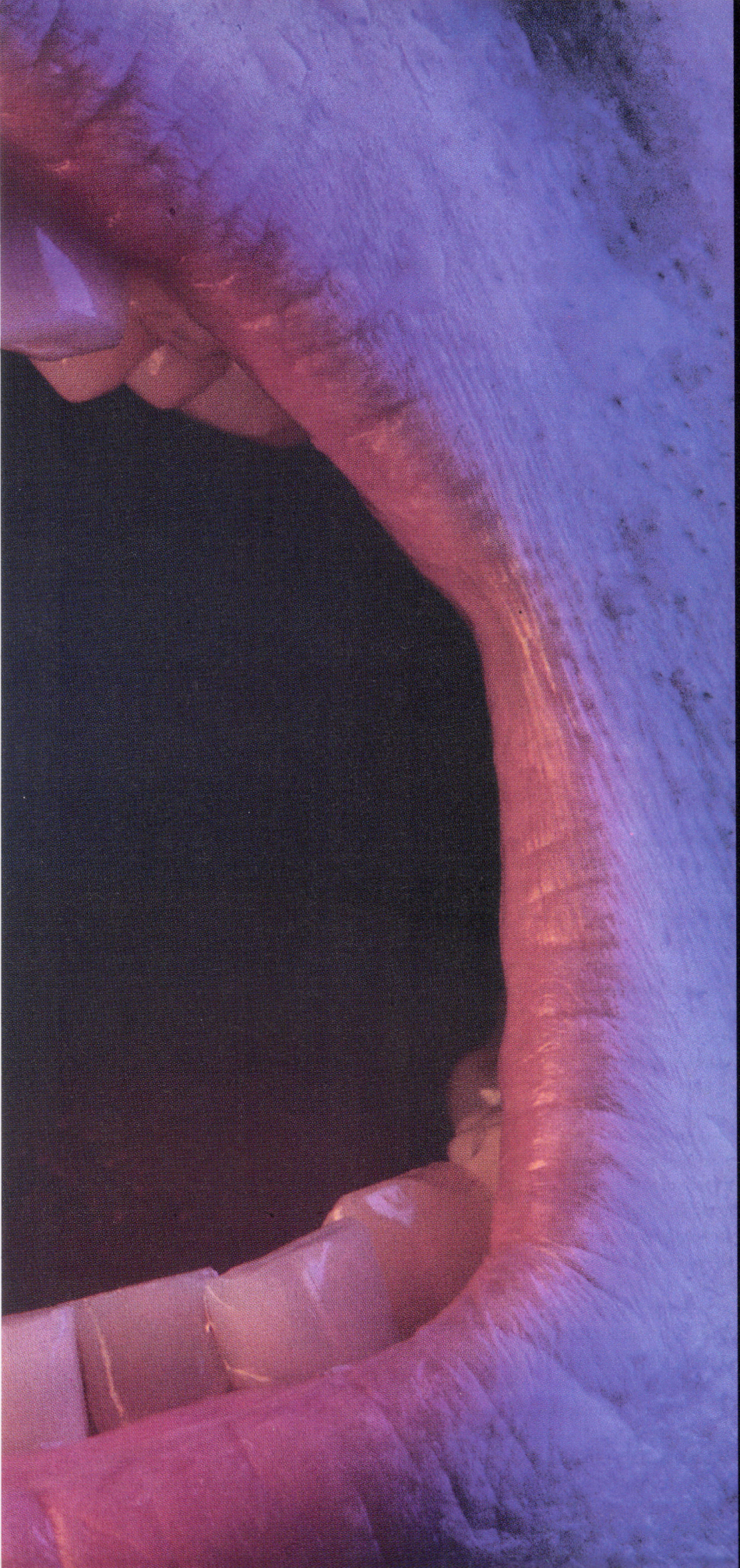
Multiplayer: How easy is it to use and how much fun is it as a multiplayer game? An independent rating.

PC GAMES A LIST™

Here's the top 20 titles that we've rated as either an A or A- in the last year.

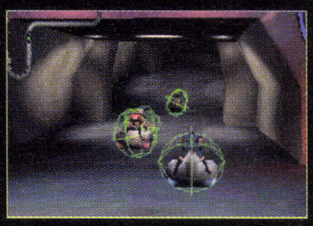
See the complete 1996 and 1995 A Lists on our Web site.


A NEW DIMENSION IN RACING.

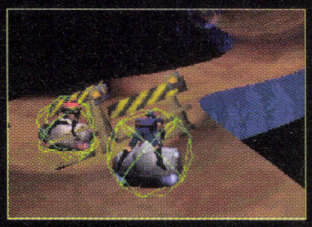




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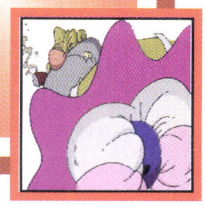
PC CD-ROM

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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GAME OF THE MONTH

Toonstruck

By Peter Olafson



PC GAMES A LIST

Toonstruck starts out so sweet and safe that you could just vomit. The king's head is a happy face. His doormen are a pair of chirpy armadillos. The country is called Cutopia, and you're building something called a Cutifier.

Excuse me—is there a cute-sickness bag in the house?

Indeed, you may think after the first 15 minutes or so that Toonstruck is a misfiled children's game. I saw it early in its development, knew what was coming, and still, was fooled good and proper. The early scenes are so patently inoffensive that I kept wondering when I was going to fill out a multiplication table or outline a sentence.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We've been set up by experts. Toonstruck, the first release from Virgin's new Burst label, builds up the sugar only to tear it down. This masterful hybrid of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* artistry and Day of the

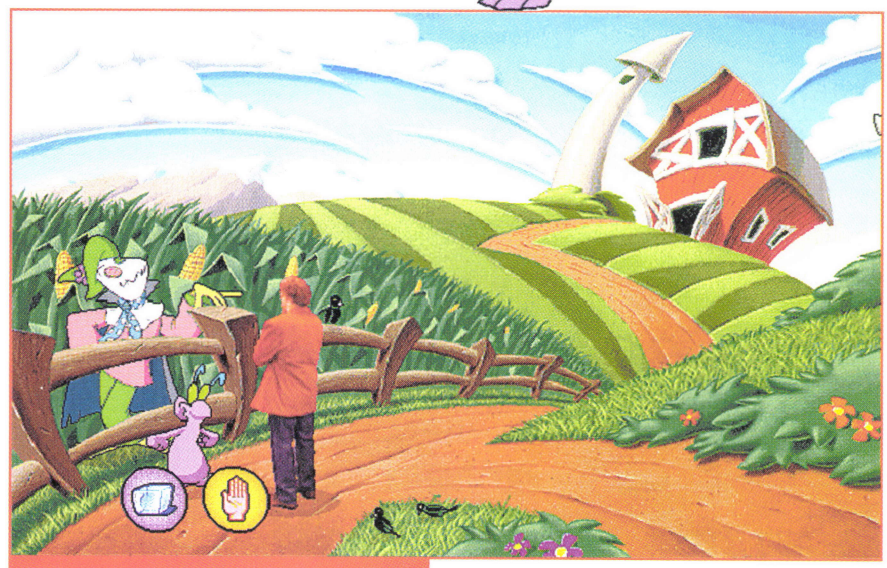
Can you say "twisted"?

Tentacle–era LucasArts is a wicked production number, golden with the promise of the medium and the intelligence of its creators.

This two-CD animated adventure pairs Drew Blanc (a filmed Christopher Lloyd) and Flux Wildly (a high-spirited lavender blob with the voice of Dan Castellanetta, TV's Homer Simpson) on a quest to save Cutopia from the clutches of the evil Nefarious (the voice of Tim Curry).

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Actually, Toonstruck starts in the real world. Drew animates the most saccharine of saccharine cartoons, "The Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun Show." For its 10th anniversary, his boss—that fellow famous from commercials for his bore-you-to-death voice—decrees there's to be a "Fluffy & Friends" show and orders Drew to produce its characters by the next morning.

Drew is slaving over the project at 4 a.m. when he finds the "Fluffy" cartoon inexplicably on the air. On inspecting it more closely, he's sucked through the TV screen...and winds up in a castle in Cutopia with his cartoon creation, Flux. The king (the voice of *M*A*S*H*'s David Ogden Stiers) hands the two the mission, and you're on your own.



Scarecrows have come a long way since *The Wizard of Oz.*

And Cutopia—sickeningly sweet, Disney-esque Cutopia—is just the beginning. You'll also have to explore Flux's home, Zanydu, where you'll find an octopus played by Dom DeLuise, and Nefarious' strange Malevolands.

Once you're out of the castle, you'll begin to discover that everything is not quite the sweetness and light it appeared to be within. In town, you'll find a bar with an outrageous pipe organ and a seemingly impossible-to-catch mouse making faces at the patrons. The bartender speaks in an Irish accent in one sentence and a Scottish one in the next.

"That's an interesting organ you have there," Drew tells him. "Auch!" says the bartender. "My kilt's riding up again, isn't it?"

Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore.

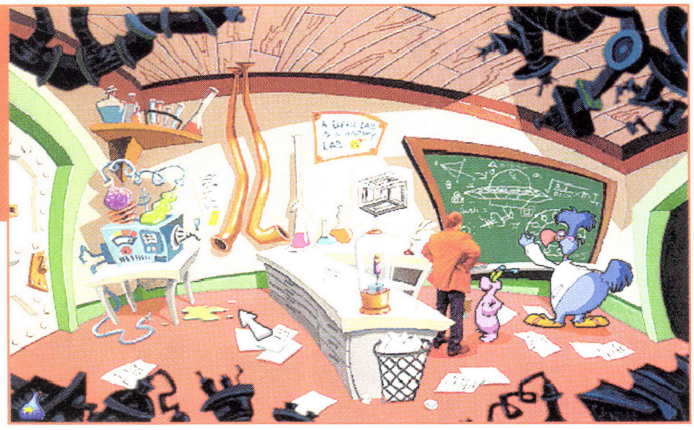
Just south of town, you'll find a little bunny with huge eyes who giggles every other sentence. (Is that barf bag still around?) Talk about deconstruction: She screams like a banshee because someone gave her cotton candy instead of popcorn, tells you how cute her "poops" are, and asks, "Want to sniff my sweet fluffy bottom?" You shouldn't be surprised to learn that Flux's response is imbued with a certain amount of Pee-Wee Herman.

To the west, an effeminate scarecrow resides. "This old thing?" this lispy creature tells the pair, when complimented on his cape. "Hate it. I call it Cape Fear."

Is that a Warner Bros. cartoon? No way.



And then there's the old horse at a nearby barn. Unlike the cow and sheep who share the dwelling,



Get Bricabrac to help you with your journey.

Elmer is "special." "Special?" asks the ever-sensitive Flux. "I just figured he was a total retard or something."

No toe is immune from getting stepped on. The guard at Zanydu's fish-flushing outhouse does a splendid Jack Webb routine. The dog at the Wacme store can only be Ross Perot, and elsewhere I heard echoes of Phil Silvers, Terence Stamp, and Dana Carvey's pumping-iron routine. Toonstruck makes fun of everything—not least, cartoons.

The basic concept shouldn't hold many surprises. Using a mouse, you direct Drew through 2D scenes with Flux in tow, collecting objects in a bottomless bag—yeah, it's an Object Quest—and using them to solve puzzles and satisfy the desires of your little animated pals. The "carecrow" wants a new outfit. B.B. Wolf wants a bottle of vino. Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun wants a beating. (Just kidding: She wants popcorn.)



The Malevolands sure looks scary.

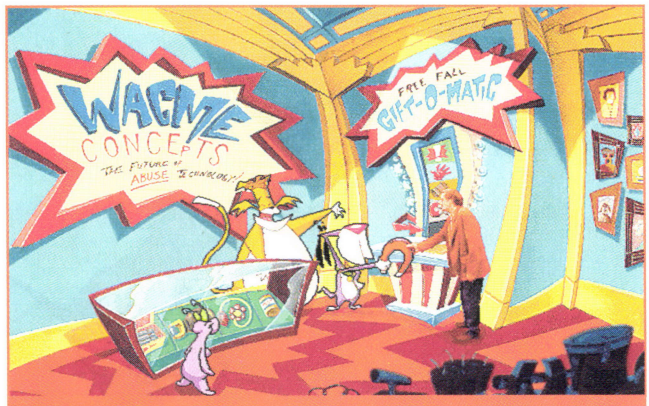
The artwork is classy throughout. Some of it has a Tentacle-like cast—everything slightly out of kilter—but it's much richer and glossier. Some of the animations, such as the face-making mouse at the bar and the elephant that powers the shuttle to Zanydu, recall some of Warner Brothers' distinctive theatrical shorts of the 1950s. And when our heroes finally nail King Hugh's arrogant footman—literally a foot, with a set of eyes for each toe —it reminded me of nothing so much as the Wile E. Coyote cartoons of the same period.

Technologically, Toonstruck is just about flawless. Lloyd is melded seamlessly into the background. The music, consisting of light classical themes, is genuinely lovely. The voices are clear and distinctive—accompanied by text, if you like. The game feels special; every bit of work that Burst piled into it shows. The interface isn't especially new, but the developers didn't make any real mistakes, and you won't make any either. It's pure point-and-click, and it's difficult to imagine anyone needing to look at a manual.

Objections? Well, I don't want to spoil the party, but for all the good stuff, Toonstruck isn't quite laugh-out-loud funny. Sure, it's consistently amusing, but the timing doesn't approach the heights that LucasArts reached in its Monkey Island games. (Admittedly, the challenge of a talkie adventure is greater than one that's only written.)

I also wish it was more creative in its responses when you use an object in the wrong place. More often than not, it tosses up a non-specific sound effect that's out of keeping with Toonstruck's anything-for-a-laugh ethic. And I'm not sure that the best use of Christopher Lloyd is as a straight man for a little lavender blob with green glasses. He doesn't have many chances to step out.

So there's room for improvement. But not much: By any standard, Toonstruck is one of the year's best and most daring adventures. Cutopia is on the map, and Burst is off with a bang.



Down at Wacme, you can see Warp and Woof abuse each other.



It's Seedy, the butt-bowling bartender!

TOONSTRUCK

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Gorgeous. Outrageous. Fun.

DEVELOPER: Burst
PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
800-874-4607
www.toonstruck.com
PLATFORM: DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486/66 (Pentium 90 recommended), 8MB RAM (16MB rec.), DOS 5.0, Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive (4X rec.)
ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: $59.95

TIPS ▼ You can't talk to Bricabrac until he finds his glasses, and he won't know to look in his pocket until after the Footman suggests it to you. ▼ The guards will drop the key to the king's bedroom during their welcome dance. (Awful, isn't it?) ▼ To open the trap door within, position Flux on the loose floorboard in the storage room below and step on the other end. ▼ At the bar, chase the mouse until he's standing next to the trap. Play the organ to make him dance and have Flux set off the trap. (Also, don't forget to take the poor dazed critter with you. He'll come in handy with a certain elephant.)





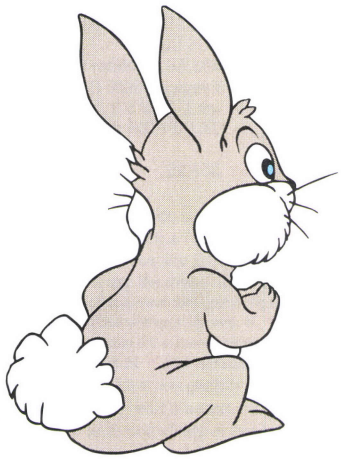


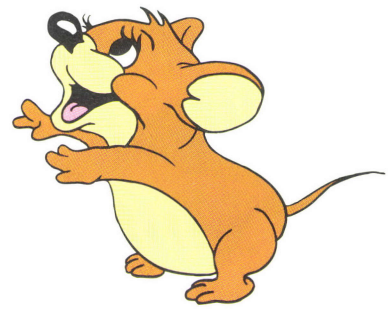
Once upon a time,

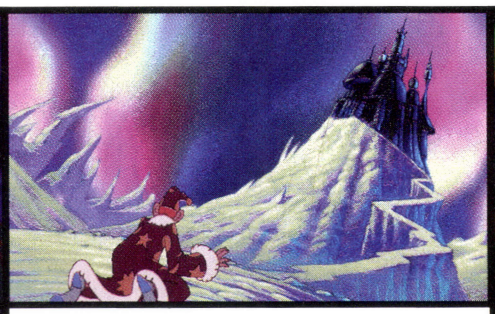
in an enchanted kingdom,

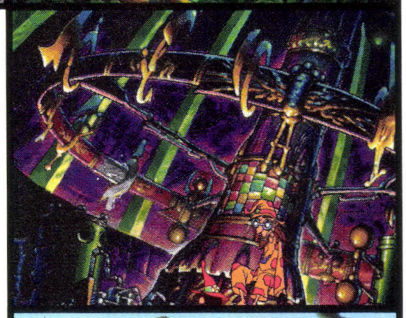
there lived a big bosomed

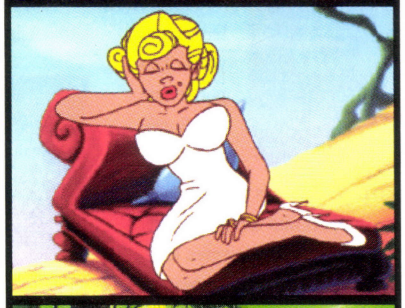
lady and some gerbils.



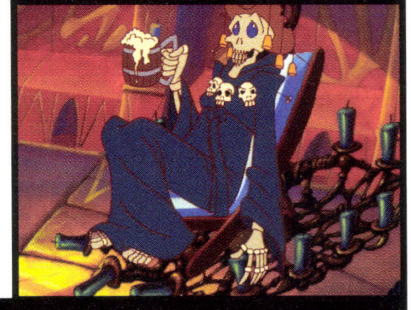






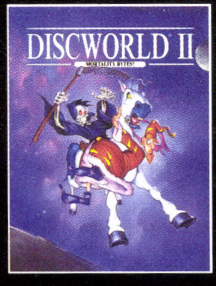


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[Discworld II features the voice of Eric Idle, former star of Monty-something-or-other.]

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ACTION

Amok

By Rob Smith



Crashing walls put on a great pyrotechnic display.

Having parents with a bizarre sense of humor is not necessarily a blessing. In Amok, a Scavenger-developed action/arcade shooter, it's quite evident that the hero of the piece, Gert Staun, suffered this problem. "Gert"—c'mon, what were they thinking? Is the trauma caused by this moniker a pivotal reason behind Gert's desire to jump into the pilot's seat of an armored battle walker, dubbed the Slambird, in an attempt to kick off a new, bloody, but profitable war? Perhaps.

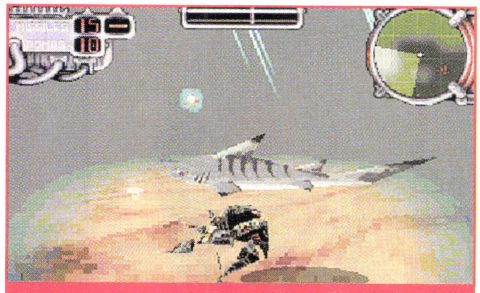
Start a war with all-out explosive action

Planet Amok has suffered 47 years of corporate war. The Bureau, Gert's employer, has benefited from this turmoil through its position as a supplier and recruiter of mercenaries and bounty hunters. However, the profit machine has now ground to a peaceful halt. By completing a series of nine missions, each featuring various tasks and objectives, you can see the benign corporations thrown back into the melting pot of destruction. And, once again, the Bureau will make a mint.

The mission briefings are well-presented, with target objects highlighted. Tasks within a mission must be completed in a logical order: For example, you'll need to destroy the generator that powers a force field before you can obliterate the fuel depot behind it.

The Slambird can adopt two forms, land- and sea-based. The ships have slight handling differences—taking your foot off the gas makes you glide to a halt underwater, but you come to a dead stop on land. Three different third-person-perspective views let you choose the best way to witness the destruction.

Deserts, plains, and superbly detailed cities provide the land-based backdrops, each inhabited by its own indigenous range of beasts and enemies. Aside from the attentions of the corporations—who defend their property with mechanized vehicles, stationary gun emplacements, droids, and swarms of cartoon-like, pot-bellied infantry—natural enemies such as kamikaze beetles and steel-jaw rats add to the difficulty. In the submerged sections, sharks and spiked guhu fish are joined by tough scuba grunts and stationary mines in an unceasing onslaught against our hero.



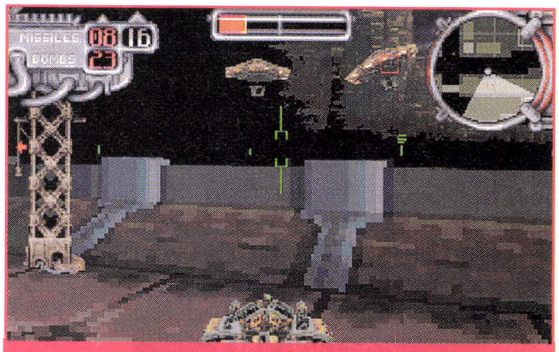
Even stumbling into a shark can be deadly.

In fact, there are loads of the little geezers shooting guns and bazookas from all angles of this 3D environment, aiming not just for you, but at each other. An unlimited supply of mini-cannon rounds, boosted in velocity and damage through powerups, is the basic weapon. Standard missiles are pretty handy, and bombs enable you to get to certain areas by taking out a large number of grunts and land mines. Heavy missiles are also needed to bash through certain barriers.

Backed by an excellent, pumping soundtrack of seven different tunes, the action is intense and non-stop. Fogging effects create a truly eerie environment, especially in the underwater segments, which is a good thing: You'll need to keep exploring to find the secret areas hiding extra ammo and powerups.

The game loses somes points for the lack of control options: your choices are keyboard or keyboard. With just nine missions—even hugely challening missions—it may also prove too short. And the two difficulty levels are something of a misnomer—"easy" is just the first two missions of the full, "hard" game.

In the end, it's a simple concept made into a challenging arcade romp. At the higher graphic resolutions, such as 800-by-600 with 32K colors, it looks like an absolute treat, though you'll need a beast of a machine. There's certainly plenty of stuff to shoot—so much so that dispatching 100 percent of the enemies seems a virtually impossible task. Amok is a sheer adrenaline rush—nothing more, nothing less.



Use your radar to watch for incoming flying saucers.

AMOK

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	A

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Pure, pumping arcade action.

DEVELOPER: Scavenger
PUBLISHER: GT Interactive
800-610-4847
www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM: DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: Pentium 60, 8MB RAM, Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
LIST PRICE: $49.99

TIPS ▼ In the desert, skirt the edges of the rocky hills to find small secrets with powerups that aren't visible on the radar. ▼ Just avoid the sharks: shooting them is fun, but it won't help you complete the mission. ▼ In the cities, go up any yellow-paved ramps to areas secreting extra health and other powerups. ▼ When you encounter groups of grunts, keep moving to avoid their fire and always target the bazooka shooters first—they do more damage. ▼ Droids are difficult to destroy, so just avoid them wherever possible. You're unlikely to win many antennae-to-antennae shootouts. ▼ If you're confident after completing a mission, scout around for extra health and hull powerups before heading for the rendezvous point.

How did we come up with the exciting new features found in Destruction Derby 2?

By accident.





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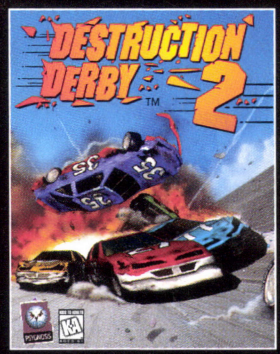
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KIDS TO ADULTS

K-A

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM



Destruction Derby™ 2 is the perfect combo of balls-to-the-wall racing and 3D wreckage. Seven new tracks are longer, wider, faster, plus four destruction bowls. Cars roll, cars flip, cars fly off the track. There's more deadly debris to deal with - tires, doors, hoods get jettisoned and serve as incoming missiles. There's all new fire, new explosions, and improved suspensions for more realistic handling. Destruction Derby 2. Designed exclusively for the true connoisseur of crash.

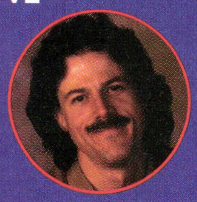
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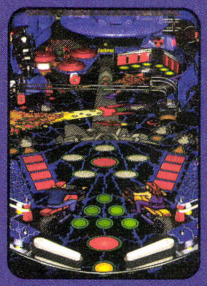
Rick Stetta
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KIDS TO ADULTS K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Bedlam

By Peter Olafson



A once-impressive building crumbles in a cloud of fire.



ACTION

Action gamers would have to be crazy not to pay a visit to this Bedlam. This isometric shoot-'em-up—a striking composite of the Crusader- and Syndicate-style games—has enough graphic intricacies, intuitive play mechanics, and heartening explosions to keep you involved for weeks.

Love those explosions...

As the hero, you control up to three Mechs (here called Remote Assault Tanks) on a 25-mission campaign to remove an infestation of "biomex." (I don't know. Don't ask.)

A superb briefing display provides a detailed overhead map of the mission area with highlighted objectives that can be displayed in closeup when you click on them.

After checking out the map, you'll want to head to the armory to load up on weapons. The bad news: You have to pay for ordnance. The good news: The game auto-configures your craft to stay within budget. There are lots of options, ranging from needler guns that barely kick up dust to Hades bombs that reduce whole regions to raging firestorms.

Finally, you're dropped off at the insertion point by a great gleaming aircraft. Gameplay is simplicity itself: one mouse button for movement, one for firing. The game makes clearly audible announcements when you achieve objectives, and displays as-yet-unachieved ones on a useful (but not too useful) in-mission map.

It all looks wonderful. The explosions are the first and best reason to play Bedlam. They're glorious—almost epic—and they bring home the memorable satisfaction of mass destruction as well as any game in recent months.

Fortunately, there's plenty of demolition work. The missions tend to be go-in-and-blow-up challenges. That's not to say there aren't puzzles. Objectives are often protected, remote or both. You'll find yourself combing the landscape in search of teleporters to unlock off-limits areas, pressure pads to raise or lower sections of terrain, and control switches to disable forcefields.

Battle it out in close quarters.



Through it all, though, it's very much an action game. Powerups strewn about the playfield add to your score, pocketbook, energy, and speed.

Moreover, the game is full of delightful little touches other than the way things go "splat." The explosions are great, but the buildings look even better—both before and after a conflagration. You'll also see yourself performing on big-screen TVs spread throughout the levels. The playfield has depth, and you'll have to travel in tunnels (in which your character vanishes, Syndicate-style) and on catwalks. I even liked the intro's big beat and cinematic title sequence.

In fact, I have few complaints about Bedlam. The saved-game routine is rather fragile. If you miss the opportunity to save after a mission, tough bits, babe. In-game speech is a bit risqué, and not for any persuasive reason. (Besides, if your Mechs are remote-controlled, who exactly is doing the talking?) And performance under Windows 95 is slightly sluggish. I'd recommend playing under DOS.

Nevertheless, this is a delightful surprise. I've got Bedlam on the brain.



So little time, so much to destroy...



Whoops, there goes another building.

BEDLAM

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

B+ OVERALL

All-out action in the tradition of the Crusader games.

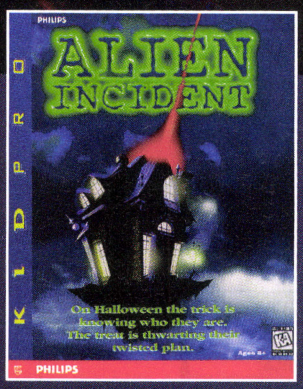
DEVELOPER: Mirage Technologies
PUBLISHER: GT Interactive
800-610-4847
www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM: Win 95/DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486DX/66 (Pentium recommended), 8MB RAM (16MB rec.), Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card
LIST PRICE: $49.99

TIPS ▼ Lure enemies across their own land mines. ▼ Scout out each level, noting the locations of forcefield controls and ammunition caches. That way, you'll be able to plot out the most efficient course when playing for keeps. ▼ In the multi-RAT missions, constantly monitor the status of the idle units. Otherwise, you could be in for a nasty shock.

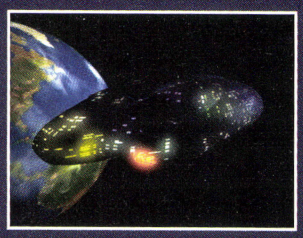
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PC-CD ROM



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Area 51

Shoot...it's time to shoot again



For a place that officially doesn't exist, Area 51's been getting an awful lot of attention lately. But its the wrong kind of attention: The purported government secret base has been infiltrated by aliens, and you're part of the special paramilitary team sent in to clean up the mess.

Let's not mince words: This conversion of the Atari coin-op is basically Virtua Cop with bitmapped enemies and an oddly filmed actor replacing polygons. It's a clone of that most celebrated of rail shooters, but a well-done clone—one that expands its reach and adds to its depth.

By whatever means necessary

You move through the base in scripted stages, killing off formerly human caretakers (gray-skinned zombies who are hosting incubating aliens) and grown aliens in "on tracks" shooting-gallery sequences. They give up the ghost in a satisfying display of blood and bone, and between alien annihilations, you can blast ammo boxes and obliterate floating powerups to get a hold of weapon upgrades.

In short, there's a lot to shoot. Like the Crusader games, you can trash everything: computers, barrels, window panes—even your colleagues. The explosions look real, particularly when you set off one of the yellow barrels dotting the landscape. Blowing them to hell is the way to secret rooms, a search that'll keep you coming back for more.

The backgrounds you'll be blasting are detailed and convincing—especially during a mid-game jeep sequence that's one of the game's best moments. In places, their moody look combined with the cries of your fellow troopers contributes a certain *Aliens* mood.

Still, the front-end looks cheesy, and the ending's rather weak. Worst of all, the game's *way* too short. I amazed myself by finishing the Easy setting in 45 minutes and polishing off Medium difficulty in about two hours.

I liked it. I just wanted more.

—Peter Olafson

AREA 51

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	C

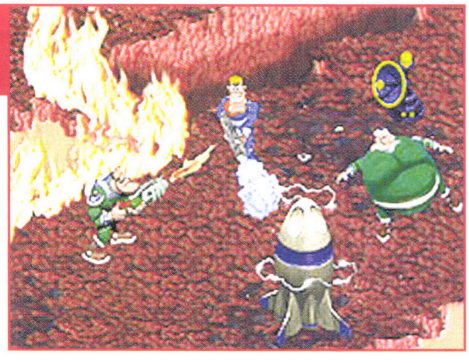
B- OVERALL

Nice game—for a few hours.

DEVELOPER: Williams Entertainment
PUBLISHER: GT Interactive
800-610-4847
www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: Pentium 60, 8MB RAM (16MB recommended), Super VGA with 1MB of video RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse
LIST PRICE: $39.99

Captain Quazar

The Cap'n can't quite overcome the glitches.



Captain Quazar? More like Major Havoc—both for good and bad.

This Windows 95 translation of an angled-down shoot-'em-up originally appeared on 3DO. It offers enjoyable mayhem when it works well. Unfortunately, as with many console ports to the PC, it doesn't work as well as it should, or as often as it should.

The Captain, a great blond lout with Popeye's chin, is assigned to take down the galaxy's bad guys in 10 missions pleasantly large in scope and rich in destruction. They're set in sprawling, multi-directional levels viewed from a third-person point of view just above and slightly downwind of the Captain. These levels—and almost everything in them—come apart in rich animations. Walls, buildings, storage tanks, the works, are there to be turned into smoking ruins—if you have the time and the ammo (you start out with a Big Gun, missiles, and grenades).

Some hero!

Ammo, first-aid kits, and the occasional extra life are unearthed in these ruins. Sometimes, you'll smoke a building and come across a sooty survivor waving a white flag. These turncoats may offer codes to teleporters, point you toward money caches, or make known that there's more to a level than meets the eye.

As lively as it is, the game ultimately has a wearisome quality. It takes too long to get past the multi-segment intro screens and into the action. Enemies have an irritating habit of materializing out of nowhere. The scenery wasn't quite varied enough to keep my interest; it starts to look like different arrangements of the same tiles. And while the game aims for a comic-book goofiness, it isn't all that funny. (I don't like getting flamed by my boss when I pause the action.)

Worst of all, I didn't play a single session without interruption by some sort of technical problem. On a 32MB Pentium 133, the game often displayed corrupted graphics (sometimes the Captain himself was invisible!), hung up on a skipping CD soundtrack, or just plain locked up the machine.

Sorry, Cap'n. It was a nice try, but I just pressed Eject and gave your CD a dishonorable discharge.

—Peter Olafson

CAPTAIN QUAZAR

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	D
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

D OVERALL

Play is okay, tech hassles aren't.

PUBLISHER: Studio 3DO
800-336-3506
www.3do.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486/66 (P90 rec.), Win 95; 8MB RAM (12 MB rec.), Super VGA with 1MB of video RAM that supports Direct Draw (2MB PCI card), 8-bit sound card that supports Direct Sound, 2X CD-ROM drive
LIST PRICE: $39.95

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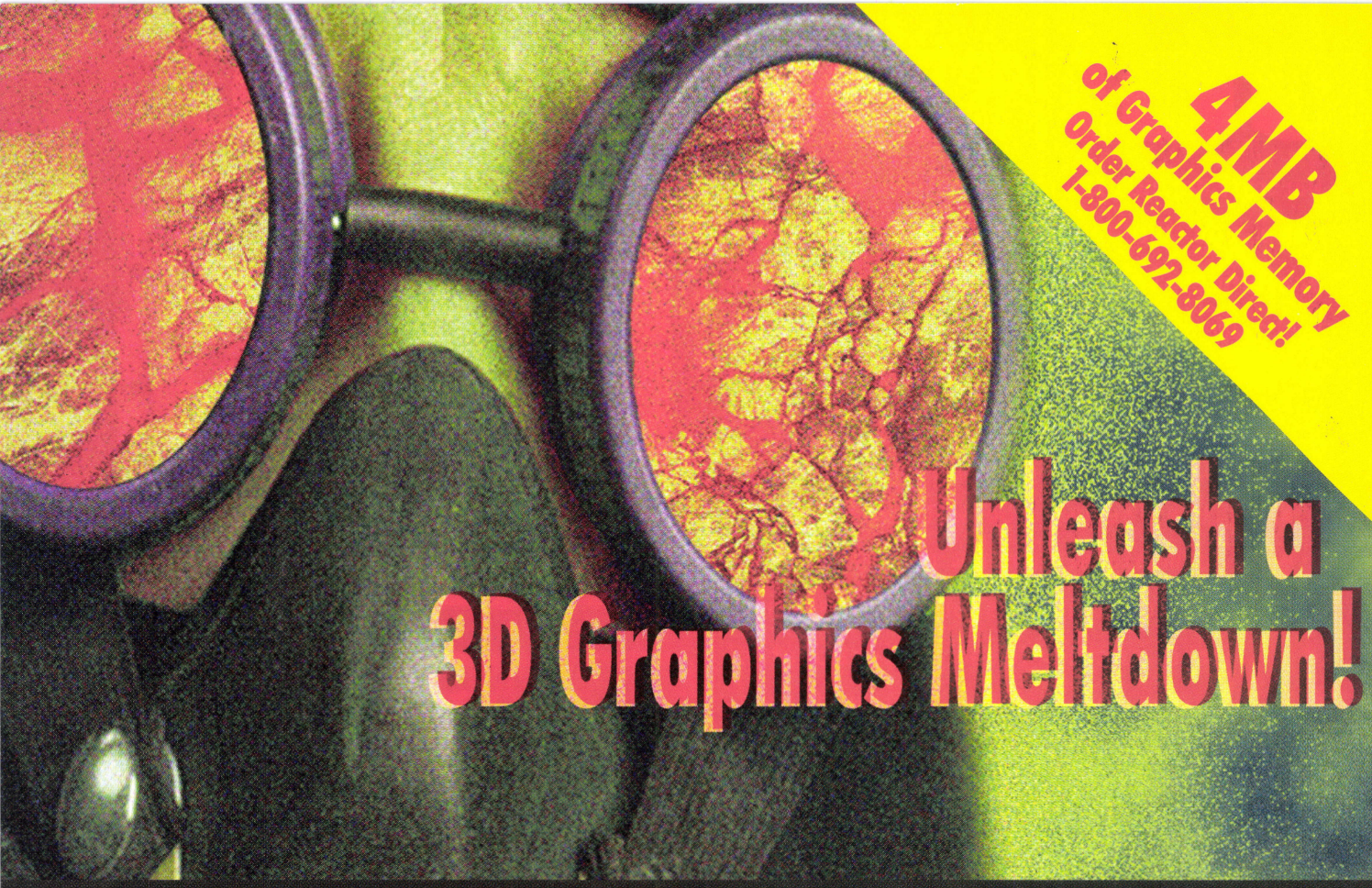
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DOMINION

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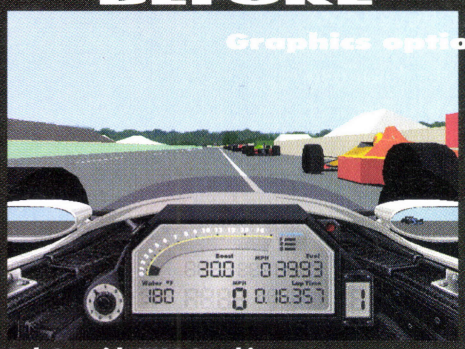
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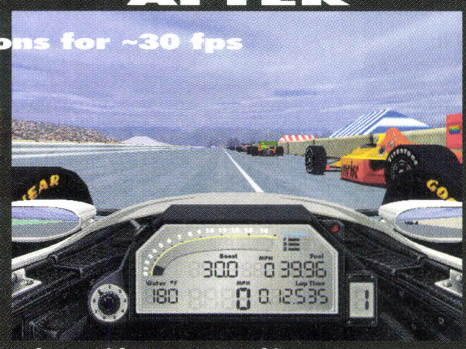
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INTERGRAPH

Sonic CD



Look at that jump! Yep, you're Sonic, all right.

He's back! And after all these years, he looks exactly the same!

Which, of course, is the problem. I was looking for more in Sonic's PC debut. After all, in this day of Pentium processors and 3D graphics accelerators, I didn't expect to find the same old game that's kept Genesis owners hooked for years.

Same old Hedgehog

Despite some clever new twists (the ability to teleport to different areas of a stage by flipping signs, for example), this is still the same old Sonic: dashing through one world after another collecting life rings and power emeralds, racing through the two-dimensional worlds of tunnels, cliffs, bridges, and elevators. As always, his ultimate mission is to save animals from the clutches of the evil Dr. Robotnik, though in this case, the hostage is his girlfriend, Amy the Hedgehog.

The one real change is an impressive 3D stage reached by nabbing more than 50 rings before finishing a level. Hit a series of flying UFOs successfully and you'll receive a Time Stone. You must acquire all seven Time Stones before Dr. Robotnik does in order to save your darling Amy.

Lest you think it's only Sonic that has to jump through hoops, there's a few obstacles Sega has left in your path. A massive 155MB full installation is a bit excessive. (Little guy, big game.) I was also irritated to find that Sonic doesn't even remember the gamepad configurations from one session to another.

Hardware problems aside, Sonic's still a highly playable arcade game. Let's just hope that if there's a sequel, the creators bring something new to a rather old formula.

—Sam Marshall

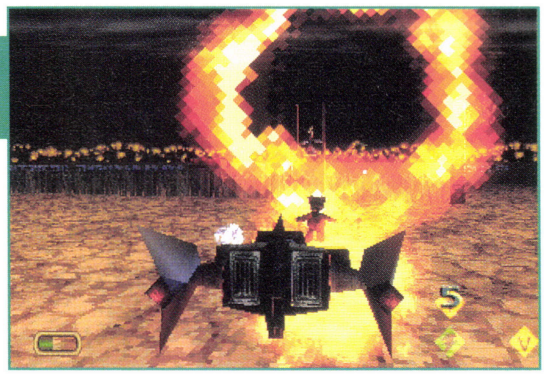
SONIC CD

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Still a classic, but it could use some updating.

PUBLISHER: Sega Entertainment
888-734-2725
www.sega.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486DX4/100 (Pentium recommended), 8MB RAM, Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
LIST PRICE: $34.95

SlamScape



The third-person view shows you more of the carnage.

Intriguing storyline and brain-teasing puzzles simply don't figure in SlamScape. Plentiful dodge-and-shoot action: yes; great electronic literature: no. The plot—for what it's worth—is that you're trapped in a virtual-reality experiment along with 16 other captives. The plan is to get you and the other guys out of this mess.

Carnival of destruction

To succeed, you'll have to navigate your way through four levels, dodging and destroying a variety of enemies to reach the Orb-Ids. Collecting powerups and ammunition along the way will help you fight your way to them. Liberate the Orb-Ids to progress to the next stage.

SlamScape's designers score high marks for providing great 3D scenery. The action is smooth and fluid as you power your Slamjet Module in all directions. The Shockball is your main weapon, but your onslaught is aided by picking up torpedoes and the Ripstar, a devastating device with limited ammo.

Your enemies are equally entertaining: clown-faced balloons, tank-like assault vehicles, mechanical spiders, teddy bears with razor-sharp claws, electric brainfish, and flying propeller blades that pick off the powerups you've so painstakingly gathered.

You'd think such a simple arcade game would be dead easy to get into, but that's not the case here. Controlling the Slamjet effectively takes some practice, and needs mastering before you can make any significant progress.

Frequent pauses in the gameplay (usually when accessing the pounding soundtrack), even on a monster PC, don't help the flow of supposedly fast-paced action. Still, SlamScape's a typical console-style title that, with the right hardware, can fly and provide uninvolved, fast, and furious gameplay.

—Sam Marshall

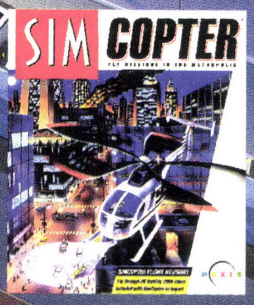
SLAMSCAPE

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Fast, pretty arcade action.

PUBLISHER: Viacom New Media
800-469-2539
www.viacomnewmedia.com
PLATFORM: Win 95
REQUIRES: Pentium 90, 8MB RAM (16MB rec.), 2MB PCI or V/LB graphics adapter (rec.), 2X CD-ROM drive, DirectSound-compatible sound card
LIST PRICE: $59.99

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SimCity 2000 not required.
Nerves of steel recommended.

MAXIS

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Grid Runner



The champion of Nimbus is one mean minotaur. Don't let him catch you...

Somewhere, in a far-flung future, the government's getting worried. Ships bound for the Nether-Planets—normally an easy trip—have been disappearing. Spaceage investigators Axxel and Tara are at a loss for clues. And to top it off, Axxel's been sucked into an intergalactic game and given a simple choice: play or die.

That's the backstory, and it's a sorry setup for what's actually a halfway decent game. Grid Runner offers you a futuristic version of capture-the-flag, pitting you against a slew of alien warriors on 15 different worlds. Be the first to nab a flag and it's run, run, run to the next one, trying to touch 'em all before your alien opponent tags you "it" and makes his own flag dash.

Capture the flag—or die

Waterworlds, treelands, infernos—you name it, it's one of the grid-bearing locales for this timeless sport. That kind of variety gives the chase some much-needed spice, as do details like the path becoming slippery on the iceworld. There are also flag guards, bombs, and pads that send you rocketing through the maze like a runaway pinball. Beneath it all is an arsenal of power-ups: teleport; run faster; lay mines; build bridges; slow or shoot your enemy.

Slinging spells (as they're called here) while dashing frantically is arcade-style fun, and it's positively exhilarating in multiplayer games, played on the same machine using a split-screen (no networking). But you can only go so far when you've got fuzzy graphics, cheesy cut scenes, and single-player action that's shorter than it should be. If you're runnin' solo, choose another race; if you've got an opponent, step on the Grid.

—Corey Cohen

GRID RUNNER

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	D
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	**C**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B**

Fun for two, fair for one.

DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
800-874-4607
www.vie.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: Pentium 90, 8MB RAM, 1 MB video card, 2X CD-ROM drive
LIST PRICE: $39.95

Creep Night



Creep Night's Castle table is the best of the three.

It takes steel balls to make a really good computer pinball game. Many designers have captured the feel of real-world pinball, but few have had ambitions beyond strict authenticity.

Scary? No way. But this pinball rocks the house

3-D Ultra Pinball was one game that successfully stretched the conventions of computer pinball, and the follow-up, Creep Night, expands on that success. Like the original, Creep Night offers up to four players the ability to play three tables, each with a lightly spooky theme (Castle, Tower, and Dungeon). You can play the tables singly or together, and each one consists of a central play field with wings to the left and right (complete with flippers).

Like its predecessor, Creep Night's a perfectly modern way to play pinball, splendidly replicating the real thing and then building upon it. This silverball's flush with lithe animations and special effects that could never be achieved under the glass: For example, a little green demon drives a car around the play field until he's squashed (for credit, of course). Balls disappear into a dimensional warp or are eaten by a roving ghost. Skeletons and Frankenstein-like monsters have to be bowled over.

Naturally, Creep Night is well-supplied with bumpers, targets, ramps, and specials. But it's also loaded with enough spectral voices and funhouse blasts of sound to make you forget just playing pinball.

It's a great game, but it's not perfect. The Dungeon table seems slightly unfinished. The ball occasionally appears to pass through the flippers and certain elements of the backdrop. The intro music is warmed-over Danny Elfman (*Batman*, *Beetlejuice*, *Tales From The Crypt*), and the intro animation is curiously busy.

And I think Sierra could have coughed up something more appropriate for a Game Over sequence than the advertising blurbs ("Try Trophy Bass 2") that appear at the bottom of the display. They're certainly creepy, but not in a good way.

—Shane Mooney

CREEP NIGHT

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	**B+**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B**

A solid flipper-fest.

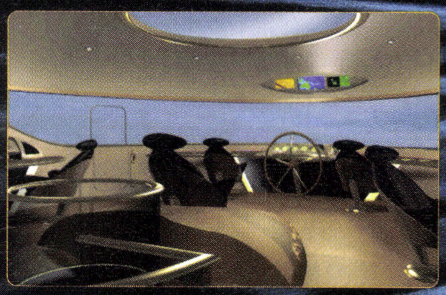
PUBLISHER: Sierra
800-757-7707
www.sierra.com
PLATFORM: Win/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486/33, 8MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95, Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: $49

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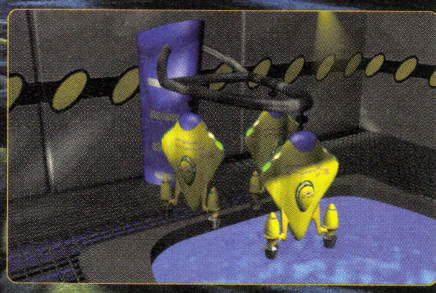
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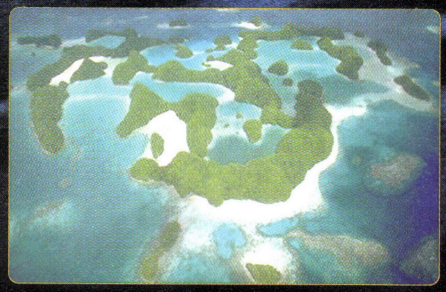
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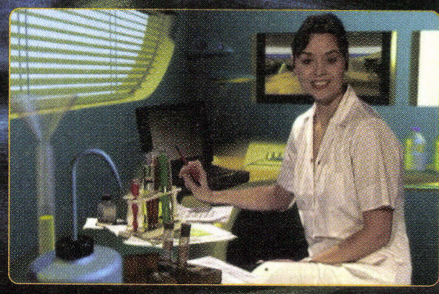


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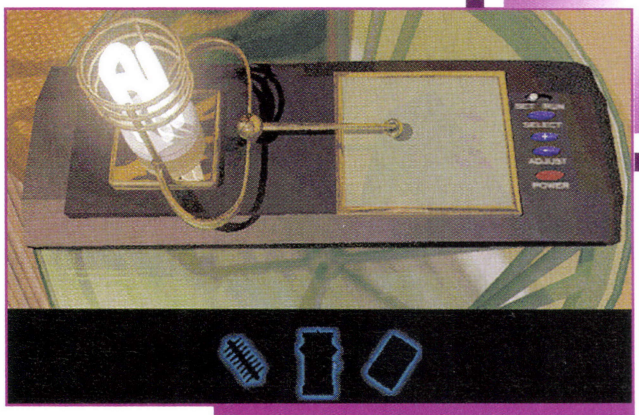
FUTURE CONCEPT

IDP

jean-michel cousteau productions

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AMBER: Journeys Beyond



Use the BAR and other scientific devices to get to the bottom of Roxy's "death."

It's a kooky world we live in. *The X-Files* is the hottest thing since the Macarena, people are shelling out big bucks for *Alien Autopsy* footage, and after a couple of hundred years of scientific pooh-poohing, ghosts are finally getting some respect. *Somebody's* got to quantify all this paranormal activity—and that's where you come in.

In AMBER, you're cast as an employee at Bio Psi, a company that's developing such a tool. A colleague of yours, Roxy, has decided to set up shop in a desolate house known to be teeming with activity. When you go to check up on her, her lifeless body is an unwelcome surprise. You wander the grounds and the house itself looking for clues to what's going on.

Explore the unknown

What you find is a full-blown Amityville: brilliant water spouts form mysteriously, messages appear before you on the bathroom mirror. What'd you expect? This is the paranormal, after all. Ultimately, you learn that Roxy's spirit was scattered in the great beyond when she attempted to cross over to the other side. As if that wasn't enough, the house is haunted by three other spirits, and it's up to you to "journey beyond" and help each of them so you can get Roxy back on her feet.

None too original, but it could have been worse. Journeys Beyond is a little better than most Myst-like adventure games. The combination of decently rendered 3D graphics and ambient sounds helps create a fairly spooky environment, and the story manages to be fairly compelling, even if it is a little far-fetched.

Yep, it ain't exactly revolutionary, but for fans of the frightful, Amber makes a nice distraction between *X-Files* episodes. —*Shane Mooney*

AMBER: JOURNEYS BEYOND

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

PUBLISHER: Graphic Simulations, Changeling
800-580-4723
www.graphsim.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD, Mac CD
REQUIRES: 486/66, 8MB RAM, 16-bit video card, 2X CD-ROM drive
ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: $45

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Noir

Watching the detective...

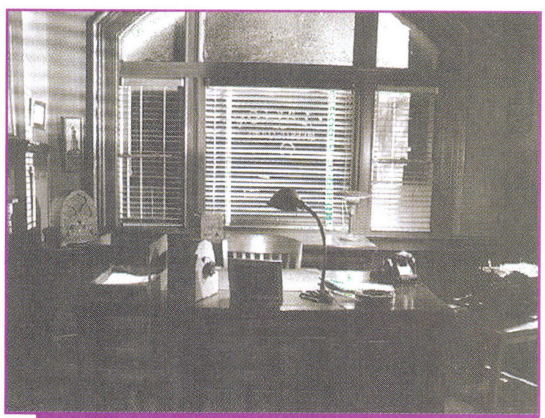
By Christine Lam

ADVENTURE

Do you ever find yourself roaming the streets at night, an internal voice-over monologue running through your head? Do you believe everyone's out to get you? Do you fear foreigners and brutalize evil, manipulative women? Do you find Peter Lorre creepy, but oddly deserving of sympathy? If you've responded yes to all of these questions, you're either a paranoid, psychotic misogynist or an avid film noir fan. Either way, you may be interested in Cyberdreams' Noir, a "shadowy thriller" designed to simulate the gumshoe detective stories immortalized by Raymond Chandler and Mickey Spillane.

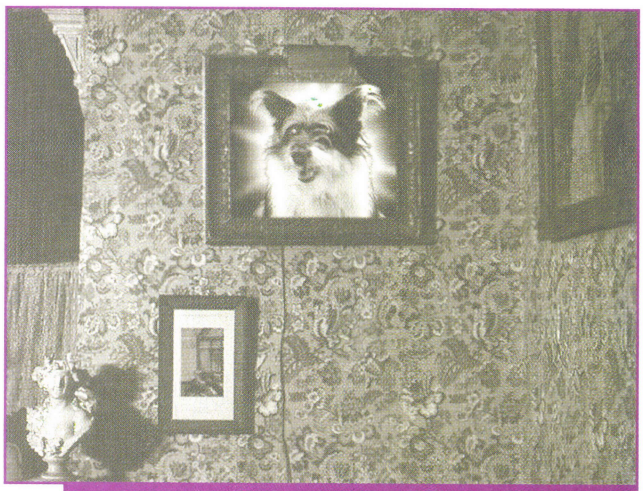
As an anonymous associate of missing detective Jack Slayton, you click through gorgeously filmed black-and-white screens, attempting to solve the cases Jack left behind—including the mystery surrounding his disappearance. Throughout the six cases, you pick up clues and meet with characters portrayed on video, who explain their role in these events. You must find a missing heiress, solve a security problem, discover the mystery behind a rare book, retrieve a missing dog, investigate the death of a race horse, and break up a shady Chinese shipping ring.

It all sounds much more challenging than it really is. Although a certain amount of timing and perception are needed to solve the cases, Noir probably won't occupy the seasoned adventurer for long. Some of the mysteries aren't that mysterious, and can even border on the ridiculous, though they do overlap in such a way that the events in one case affect the others.

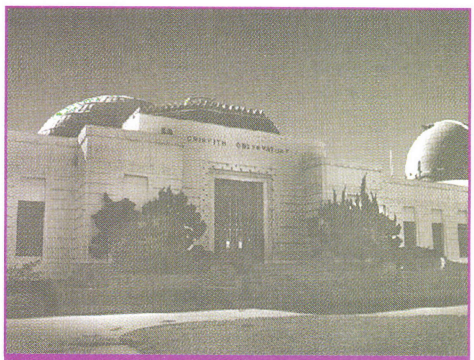


Get used to this view—you'll be seeing it a lot.

Meanwhile, the video footage features overacting and melodrama that will have you frantically hitting the Esc key to end a sequence. In terms of thrills, Noir is more *Murder, She Wrote* than *Murder, My Sweet*. Your most harrowing experience is being hypnotized by Nazis and ending up in the gutter sans memory (giving you the painful task of starting over if you didn't save).



Wo-Boy! Yes, one of your tasks is recovering Wo-Tan, the Wonder Dog.



It's a nice night for stargazing. But look out for those Nazis.

Noir makes light of the clichéd elements of film noir, causing some confusion about whether it's a spoof or an actual thriller. If it aims for thriller, it lacks the basic themes and attitudes of film noir. Every possibly offensive moment is gutted, probably to maintain political correctness. Violence and hatred toward women and immigrants, as well as the feelings of fatalism, anger, and alienation, are integral to film noir, whether one approves of them or not. Without them, it simply isn't film noir—it's just parody or struggling atmosphere.

Although Noir is visually impressive, only the most die-hard aficionados will appreciate the photography enough to plod through the mediocre gameplay. Subtle attention to small details helps—the precise use of keys, a video projector, an elevator panel—but there aren't enough of those touches to keep one interested for an extended amount of time.

If you're a huge film noir fan and remember Barbara Stanwyck as a seductive vixen worth killing for in *Double Indemnity*, you may have some interest in the game, at least for its breathtaking graphics. But if you remember Stanwyck as a perverse old woman pawing Richard Chamberlain in *The Thorn Birds*, and wonder why people even bother watching black-and-white movies anymore, perhaps it's best to steer clear of Noir altogether.

NOIR

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B

C+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

More eye-candy than adventure.

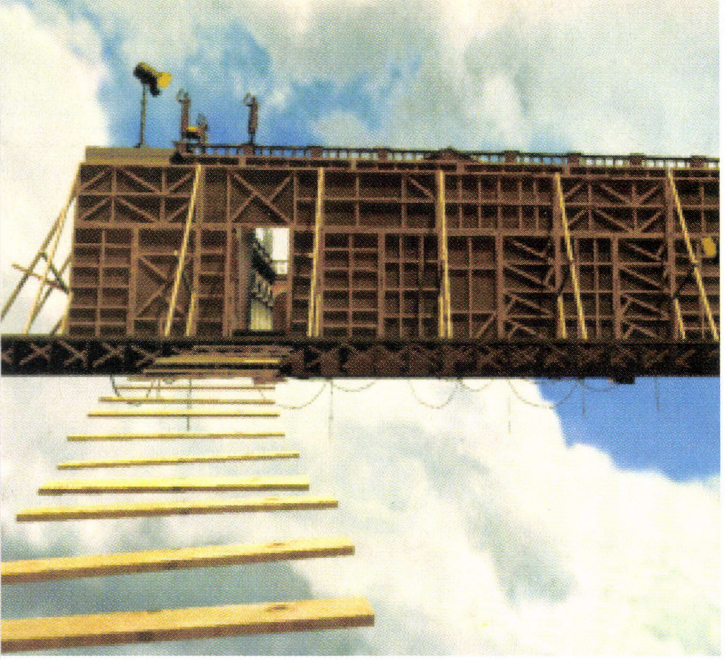
PUBLISHER: Cyberdreams
818-225-1049
www.cyberdreams.com

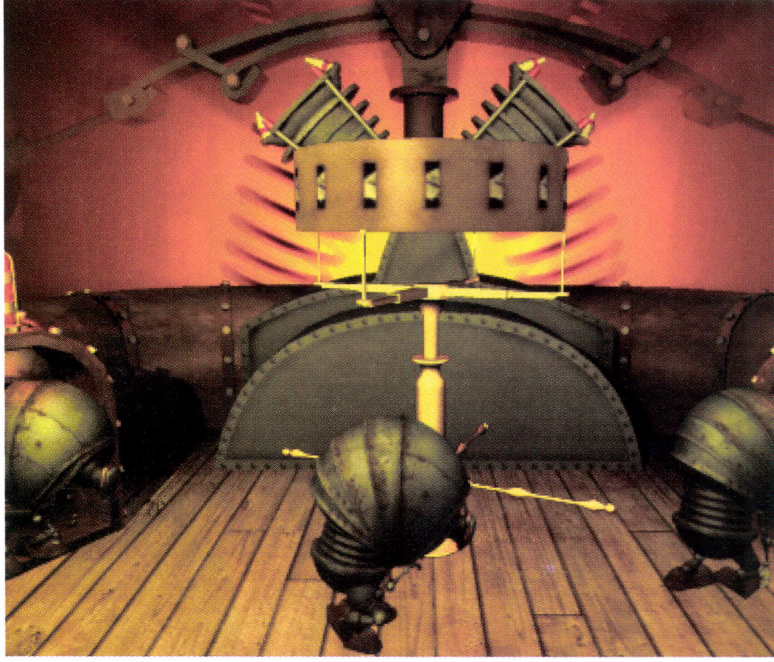
PLATFORM: Win/Win 95 CD

REQUIRES: 486/66, 8MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95, Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive

ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: $44.95

TIPS ▼ Make sure you save after each major breakthrough in each case. Failure to do so will yield much aggravation. ▼ Use the cursor to explore every nook and cranny of each location, especially Jack's office. If you miss something, it could cost you later. ▼ If you get stuck, call Jack's informant from your Rolodex for suggestions, and if you forget where you left off in the game, check your notebook in the lower-lefthand drawer of Jack's desk. ▼ Although you can pick up clues in Jack's office separately with each case, it's much easier to take care of them all at once.

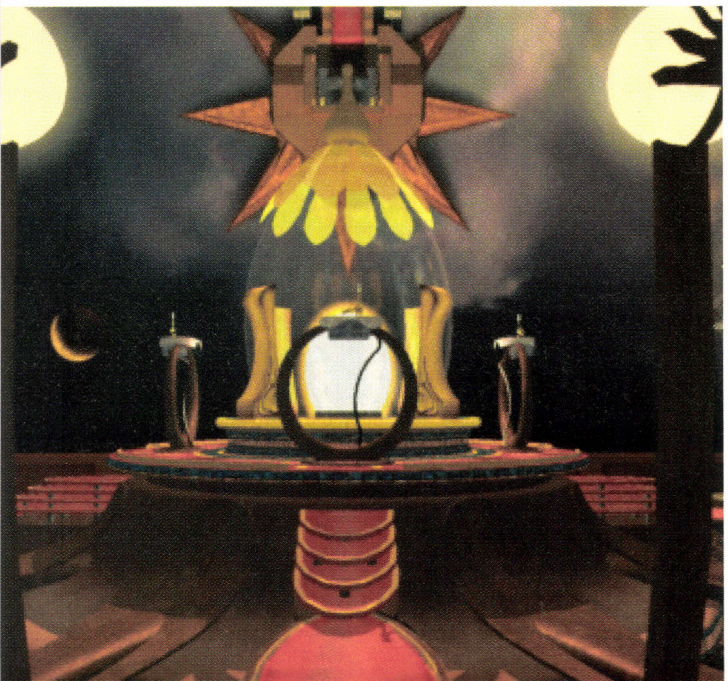




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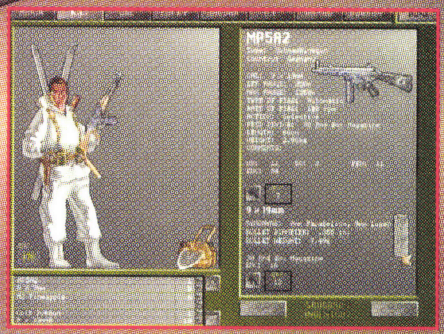
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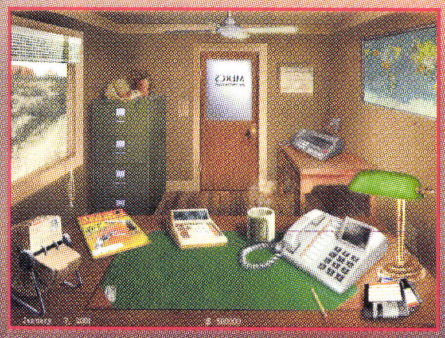
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Meridian 59

Rule the world (or at least, a world)

By Peter Olafson



PC GAMES A LIST

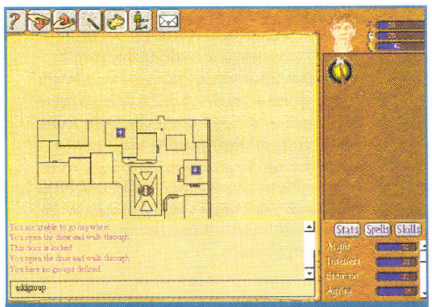
Hillary's right: It really does take a village. And I can think of no better illustration than my recent experiences in Meridian 59.

I guess I should start at the beginning. A few days ago, my review of this Internet-based 3D multi-user dungeon (MUD) was shaping up as a rather mixed bag. After a few hours online with the inviting game engine—Doom-like movement with role-playing features and a text parser—the actual game seemed daunting.

Its strong points were obvious. The engine is an utter delight; a standalone RPG would be hard-pressed to top the features. Detailed descriptions are a click away. The automap can be annotated, and key locations in the five cities are already identified. The parser is rich and flexible: you talk to people in your immediate area or "broadcast" Meridian-wide messages. The graphics aren't up to the best 3D games, but they work with smooth movement. The sound is atmospheric.



Some characters require convincing before giving you a position.



Simple, easy-to-navigate maps help the exploration process.

Ready your weapon—danger could spring from anywhere.



It was easy to install, and almost as easy to get up and running. (Netscape Personal Navigator 2.02 is bundled.) And latency? What's latency? For all intents and purposes, Meridian played as if it all resided on my machine. Even building a character—a pleasant, graphically oriented procedure in which you customize your face, stats, and skills—was a breeze.

The problem was, I couldn't get anywhere. My first day went something like this: I went out of town to find adventure. I got killed by a large insect. (A baby spider, no less.) Sans worldly goods, I had to negotiate winding staircases leading from the Underworld to one of Meridian's inns. I fell off several times before I reached the top. I went out of town to find adventure. I got killed by a large insect...

And so on. I felt like a country boy who gets mugged on his first night in the big city and staggers out of an alley in his underwear. When I logged on for a final go, I wasn't expecting much—except maybe to help feed Meridian's arachnoid population.

But then, something unexpected happened: I met someone. I don't know why he took me in hand, but he did. He gave me armor, a better weapon, and 2,000 shillings, and escorted me to the bank to stash it for safekeeping.

Now I'm killing baby spiders and worse, and I don't feel as though I'm wearing my mortality on my sleeve. Of course, there's a catch: My friend wants me to join his guild once I reach a certain level of proficiency. "Think of it as grease," he told me mildly.

Hey, I can live with that. The lesson is that the engine is just a facilitator, and that any online game is only as good as the people playing. I'm still a stranger in a strange land, uncertain of my standing, and small hairs on the back of my neck still stand on end when I see movement on the horizon. (There are some real villains lurking out there. I've seen three reports of cold-blooded murders while online.)

But now I know someone, and I feel as though I have a future. And that makes all the difference. You see the world differently when you're not staring into the abyss. Possibilities are emerging, and the potential of Meridian is vast. This online village has done its job.

MERIDIAN 59

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

A- OVERALL

A sense of community makes this great game even better.

PUBLISHER: Studio 3DO
800-336-3506
www.3DO.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486/66, 8MB RAM, Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, PPP/Slip Internet connection, 14.4Kbps modem, mouse, sound card
LIST PRICE: $49.95; first 30 days free (then $9.95 a month)

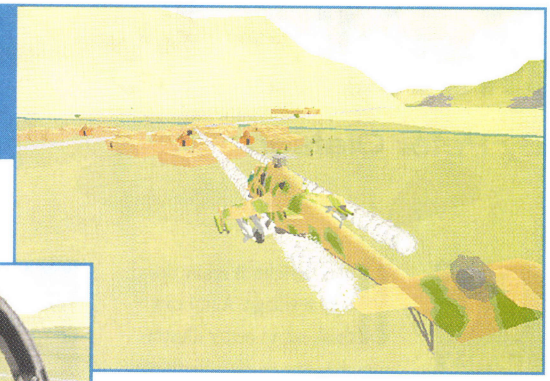
TIPS ▼ Don't carry cash; use the bank. If you die, you'll still have your loot. ▼ Don't take on anything larger than a giant rat or baby spider at the start. ▼ Stay out of Tos' cemetery at night until you've reached a fairly high level. ▼ It's regarded as bad etiquette to steal someone else's post-combat loot. (If it appears unattended, ask first.)



FLY & DRIVE

Hind

By Steve Klett



The Hind can carry hundreds of rockets, making it an ideal close-support helicopter.

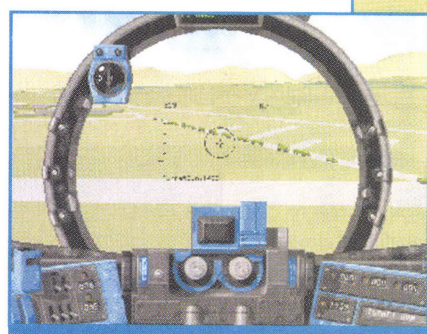
PC GAMES A LIST

Helicopter sims have always focused on American gunships, so it's refreshing to get the opportunity to fly a war machine of foreign origin: the Russian Mil Mi-24 Hind. Digital Integration and Interactive Magic—the makers of last year's excellent Apache sim—are at it again.

The Hind is an assault helicopter capable of carrying troops to the field of battle and supporting them with an awesome array of firepower. Heavily armored, the Hind is an ugly, fearsome beast designed to give and receive punishment—but not to be quick on its feet, which may seem strange to Apache flyers. They'll also have to get used to targeting and weapons systems that are much less flashy and high-tech, as the Hind's design is definitely a case of muscle over sophistication in nearly every respect.

One mean, mean flying machine

By no means does that make it less fun to fly the Hind. It's just a different experience—but a welcome one. Buzzing an enemy airfield and strafing a row of parked MiGs while taking an incredible pounding from anti-aircraft fire—and surviving—provides an awesome rush. The Hind may be a beast, but it's amazingly durable, extremely deadly, and well-respected by its enemies.



Time to do a little convoy-busting.

While Hind is a sophisticated, realistic sim designed with hard-core PC pilots in mind, Digital Integration made every effort not to exclude the more casual flyer. A Quickstart option lets novices jump in the Hind with unlimited ammo and blow up everything in sight. You can even select invincibility for an unrivaled killfest.

Three flight model modes let you select the desired level of realism. An extensive series of training missions introduces the Hind's boom, missile, and projectile weaponry and handling characteristics before you jump into career missions.

And you'll want to embark on a career. Hind offers three challenging campaigns set in Korea, Afghanistan, and Kazakhstan that advance in difficulty and provide a total of 30 riveting missions. The missions themselves are suitably varied, including escort jobs, troop insertion and retrieval, ground troop support, search and destroy, bombing, and reconnaissance.

An impressive array of multiplayer options lets you fly head to head or cooperatively, pairing up with a friend to crew the same helicopter (one of you is the pilot, the other's the Weapons Systems Officer, or gunner). Then there's a deathmatch option with up to 15 other pilots on a network, and a network team game where one team must destroy the other's headquarters. The cherry on top is Hind's ability to be networked with DI's Apache, pitting you as Russia's firepower and strength against America's nimble, high-tech attack chopper (or vice versa).

Perhaps no other sim to date has captured the feel of taking part in an actual battle as well as DI's Apache, an asset continued with Hind. As you fly to your mission target, there's plenty of activity going on around, above and below you—artillery fire bursting on the ground, tanks battling it out, fighters dogfighting, and troop convoys bustling on the highways. Meanwhile, endless radio chatter from your allies heightens the sense of realism.

As you can tell, we like this sim, and if you've flown Apache, you'll understand why. Hind has the same quality feel as its predecessor, and while it's a snap to get into, it's a challenge to master. Try it, comrade—you won't be disappointed.



The various external views, including the enemy's perspective, are particularly entertaining when you're strafing enemy troops out in the open.

HIND

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	A

Realism and firepower make Hind a powerful combat experience.

DEVELOPER: Digital Integration
PUBLISHER: Interactive Magic
800-699-4263
www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM: DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486/66, DOS 5.0 or Win 95, 8MB RAM (16MB with Win 95), Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
LIST PRICE: $49.95

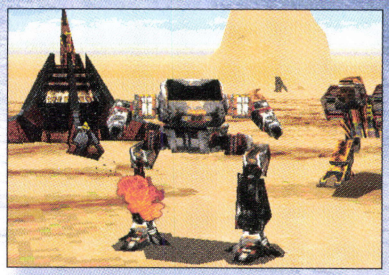
TIPS

▼ Use the external view (F6) when landing—it's easier to judge the distance to the ground and your rate of descent. ▼ Don't stray from your mission parameters. If you pursue all the extra targets, you'll find yourself beaten up and out of ammo by the time you get to your objective. ▼ Stay low and slow at the target area. If you're too high, you're an easy target for ground fire, and if you're flying too fast, you won't be as nimble as you need to be. ▼ Remember, the Hind carries extra supplies on board—you can reload many of your weapons by landing in a quiet area during a mission.

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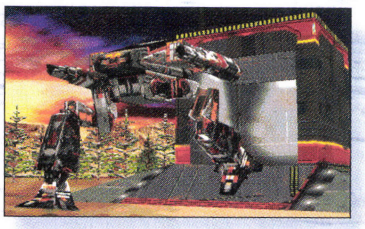
Eject from your HAWC, steal another. Bot-jacking is relatively legal here.



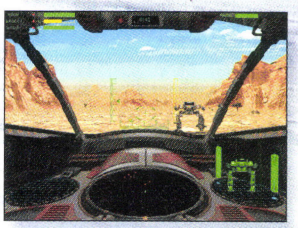
Wage war in everything from icy tundra to blistering desert. We suggest wearing layers.



Storm the enemy guard towers; try to avoid being turned into a red sinewy pile.



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FLY & DRIVE

Shattered Steel

By Rob Smith

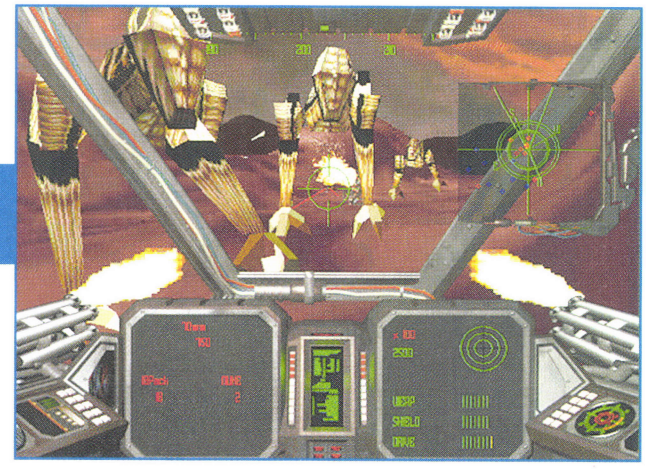
PC GAMES A LIST

Mechanized combat games are undoubtedly a popular, time-honored formula. We've all played in futuristic landscapes full of deadly robots piloted by fearless Rambo-esque characters. But few have matched Shattered Steel's look, style, and scintillating action.

Developed by BioWare, a Canadian-based group led by three medical doctors with a penchant for creating video games in their spare time, Shattered Steel takes every element of the genre and tops it. First off, there's the storyline. The future, no surprise there; warring corporations battling for natural resources, still no shocks; heroic good guy—nope, seen that, too. So what's so good about it? The way it all gels together over the course of 50 absorbing missions. That's not including the 15 multiplayer-specific missions, to be fought in deathmatches for up to 16 players.

Kill without bloodshed

The mission structure on Lanios 3, the first port of call, is initially pretty simple—defend a communications outpost, protect a bunch of escaping prisoners, attack a convoy. Yet each mission hides anywhere from one objective to four or five. AINIC, an onboard computer, is there to show you the way. From starbase Hydra IV, you take to your Corvette transporter for travel to the mission location. Onboard the Corvette are your two Planet Runners (the second gives you an extra life should a mission go pear-shaped).



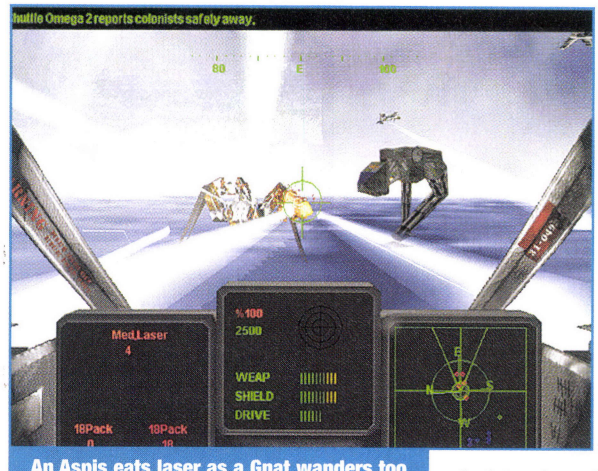
A line of Basilisks gets some cannon fire up the butt.

The Corvette also includes the storeroom where the Runners are equipped. A significant array of weaponry—lasers, mines, mortars, nukes, flamethrowers, cannons, and more—can be found or salvaged on planet surfaces, which you use to upgrade the Runner. In addition, the chassis, reactor, and shield levels have three levels of strength. Careful selection of primary and secondary weapons could make the difference between mission success and abject failure.

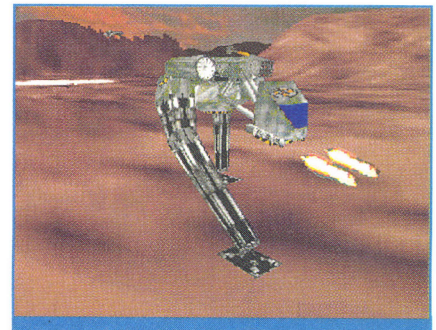
Once you hit the surface, things really heat up. Aside from the excellent shading of the landscapes, the Runner cockpit is highly detailed. An external view of the first-person action is a perfect example of how you don't need 3D hardware to achieve fast-paced, beautifully shaded locations.

Twenty-some enemies throw all kinds of plasma in your direction. Fortunately, you're not always alone. Shuttles and other Runners help you fight Gnats, Basilisks, and Aspis in assaults that require dexterous use of the fairly complex controls. Unfortunately, your allies are usually killed far too quickly to be of much use.

Backed by some outstanding sound effects—check out the spinning shot of the 50mm cannon—the various enemies, style of missions, and firepower at your disposal make for an incredibly intense experience. My only real criticism is that while the missions fit the pattern of evolving stories on each of the planets that need liberating, they're somewhat repetitive in flavor. That's despite a tremendous variation in landscapes, both in color and contours, that makes aiming, moving, and shooting a real challenge at times.



An Aspis eats laser as a Gnat wanders too close to live much longer.



External views show off the detail of your Runner and the shaded landscapes.

Really, though, it's a minor quibble. In the long run, there's enough simulation and action to please MechWarrior devotees and twitch gamers alike.

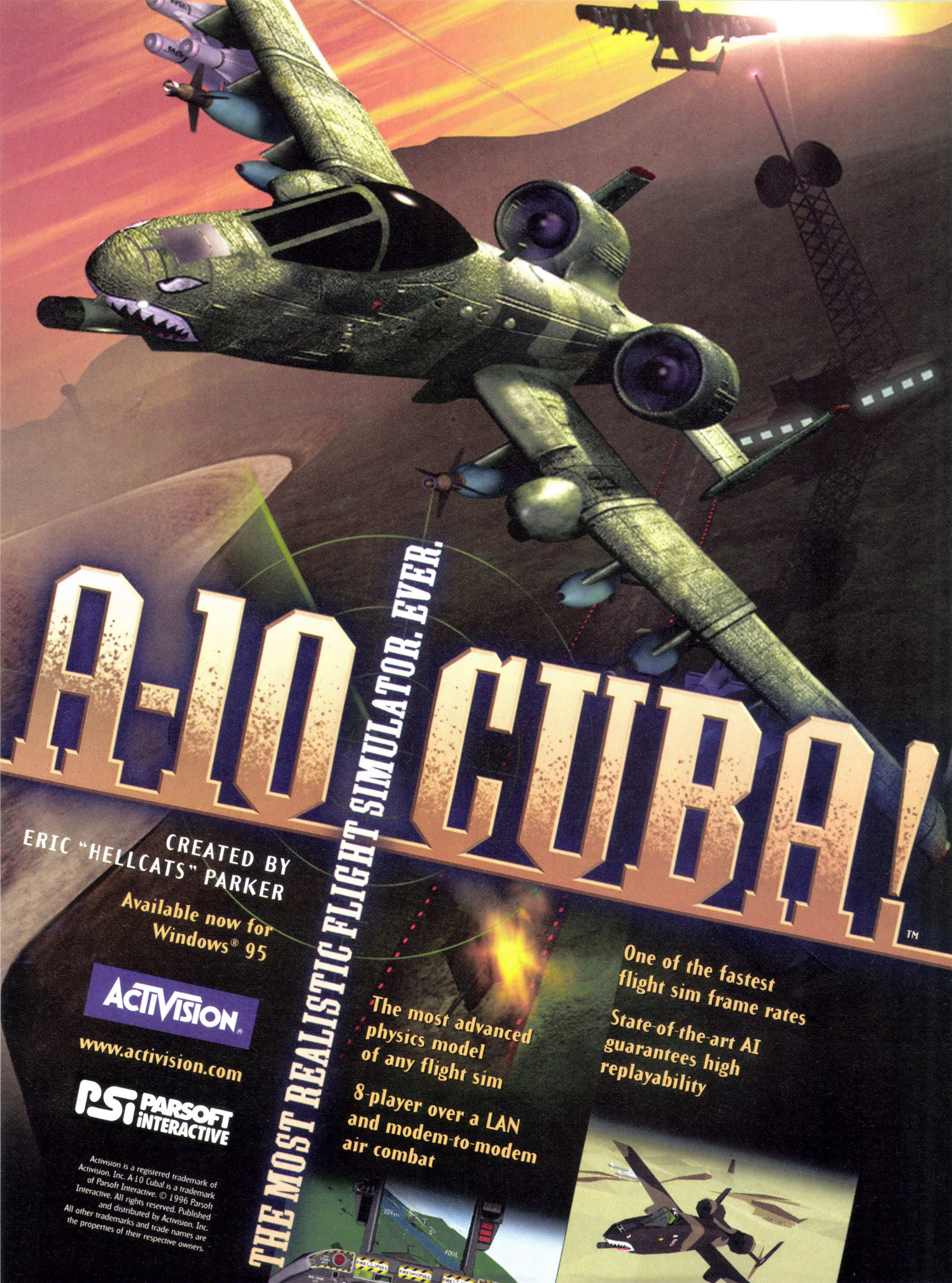
SHATTERED STEEL

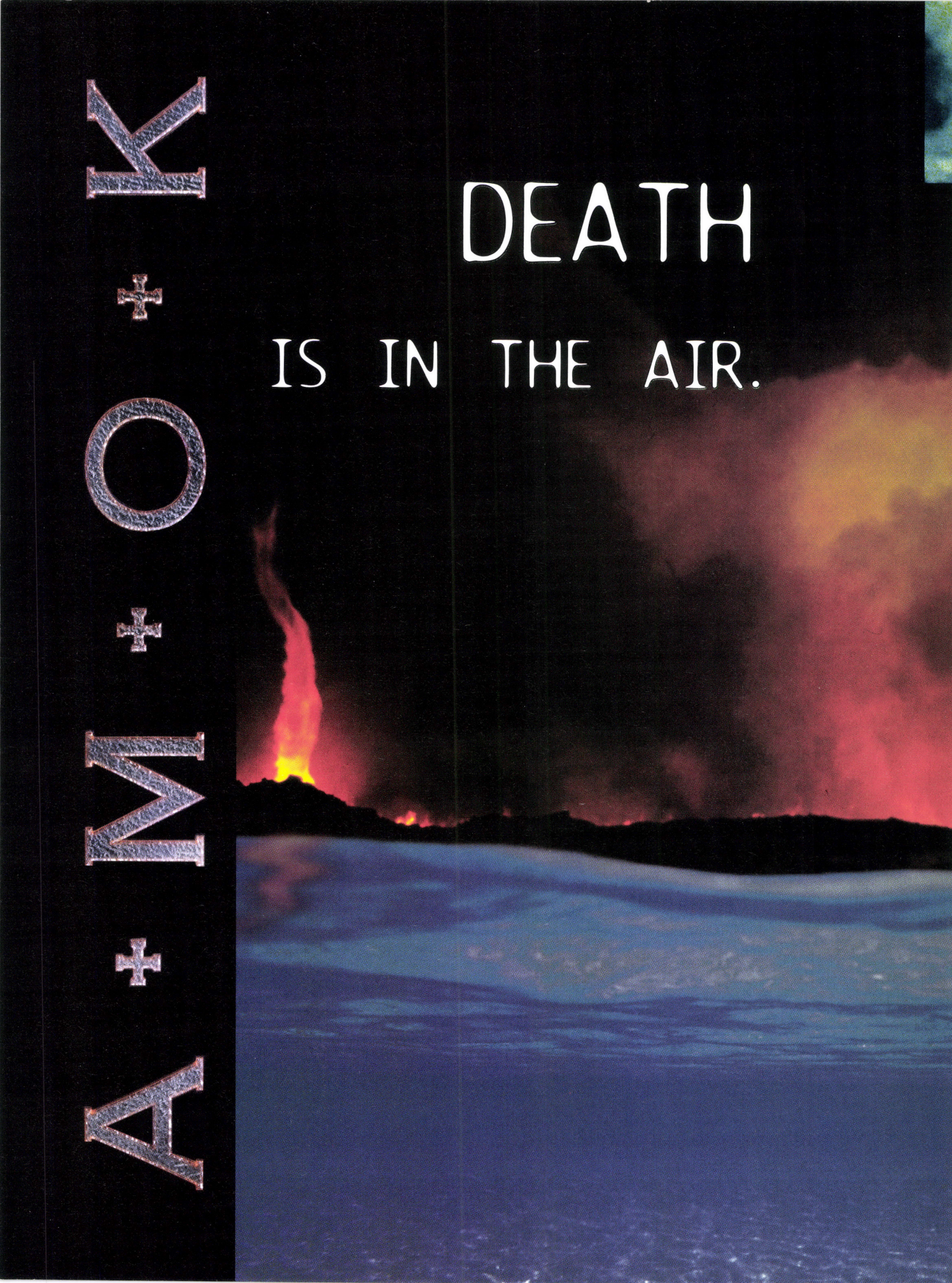
GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

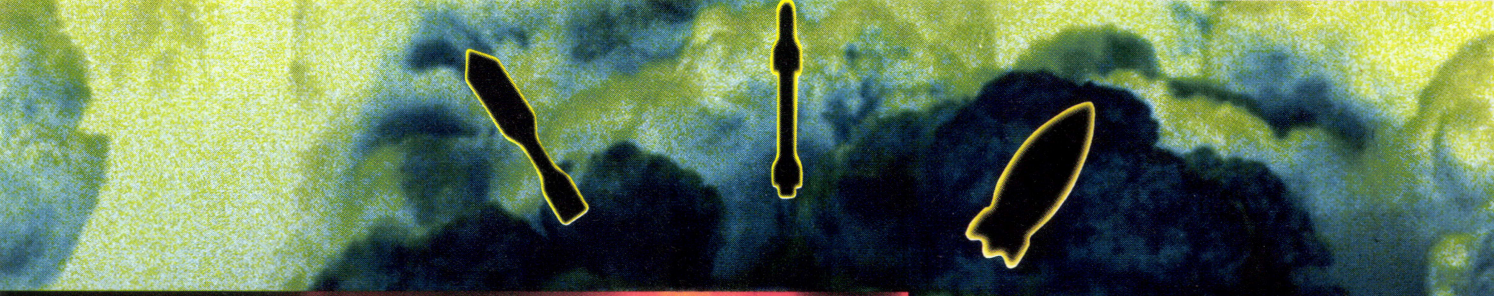
Even the best Mech games have some new competition.

DEVELOPER: BioWare
PUBLISHER: Interplay
800-468-3775
www.interplay.com
PLATFORM: DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486DX/66 (Pentium recommended), 8MB RAM (16MB rec.), 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card
LIST PRICE: $49.95

TIPS ▼ Configure the controls to let you move the Runner ahead quickly and easily. ▼ Aim for enemies' bodies with your lasers. Don't shoot maniacally, or you'll overheat. ▼ When firing, bear in mind that your missiles are fired from the top of the Runner (e.g., don't shoot them when you're right next to an alien). ▼ Use power to reinforce the shields as they're depleted. Staying alive as long as possible is the key to winning missions.


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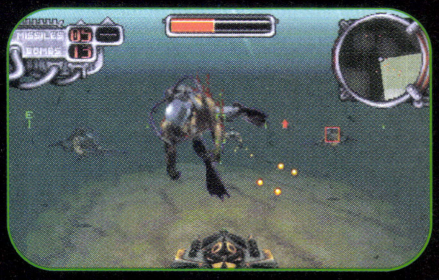




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PC CD-ROM





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STRATEGY

War Wind

By Rob Smith

Oh look, it's War... er, Wind



All four races join in mass conflicts.

There's no end to the ever-growing real-time strategy stakes—and now comes another potential contender for Warcraft II's throne.

See, I've already mentioned "it." There's just no getting away from comparing all fantasy and real-time strategy games to Blizzard's classic. Perhaps that's unfair: When a competitor like War Wind comes along, it could be unduly penalized just because it doesn't get the juices flowing in the same way.



Yow! Indigenous creatures get caught in the crossfire of a large-scale battle.



The Tha' Roon attack a walled enclave with Jump Troops.

But before we pass judgments, let's set the scene. War Wind takes place on the world of Yavaun, a planet boasting a strange enchantment that offers magic to its inhabitants as they battle each other for dominance. Woven through a detailed, well-documented history are four very distinct and very weird races, each with bones to pick with the others.

The Tha' Roon have been the dominant race for eons, much to the annoyance of the Obblinox, who acted as their warriors to ensure military might, and to the perpetual insult of the Eaggra, who tended the land and provided the slave foundations on which all great empires are built. The fourth race are the weirdos. The Shama' Li hold a spiritual position and are now seeking to unite the four factions, rather than wage war with any of the other three. (Are you still with me?)

The major departure from a pure Warcraft-style game is the development of characters through multiple scenarios. Eight characters are selected at the end of every scenario to continue the fight. This requires its own strategic planning, because leaving yourself short of workers to mine resources and build unit types proves fatal without a few judicial selections.

War Wind is hard going initially; it demands a high level of detail, of the "build x to get y and z number of y to get w" sort. Also, while the motives of elves, dwarves, and orcs require only a very basic knowledge of the fantasy milieu, you're gonna have to do some reading before immersing yourself in the struggles of Yavaun.

Protecting the clan leader is the bottom line for succeeding in each race's seven basic scenarios: He dies, you lose. Surround him with mages and more advanced characters by mining resources and building certain units. Not only does each race have its own building types and resources, but unit types can be bio-upgraded through research, so there's plenty of background to master before making significant progress. Once the battle has been won with one race, you try it using any of the others.

Combat is quite manic, although it can be structured through careful use of the 20-plus command options. Several build options are also available, presented in a simple interface that enables quick reactions to battle situations. None of the building and ordering of units is helped by the creatures' responses. Hideous screeches that pass for each bizarre race's language don't help the atmosphere.



With plenty of cash to spend, building installations allows faster development of forces.

A very simple campaign editor adds a little play longevity, as does the multiplayer option, although even here the intense resource management needed to start moving gets in the way.

War Wind tries to forge its own niche, and it may well do that. But the level of background to be uncovered and plodding early pace in each campaign makes it difficult to lose yourself in either the fantasy or the game.

WAR WIND

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	C-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	C+

C OVERALL

Too much work for too little fun.

PUBLISHER: SSI
800-601-7529
www.warwind.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: Pentium 60, 16MB RAM, 1MB Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
LIST PRICE: $54.99

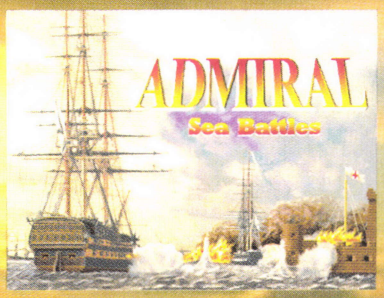
TIPS ▼ To get a head start on gathering resources and buiding structures, always carry at least one worker over from mission to mission. ▼ Your storage warehouse should be the first structure you build, unless you already have one. ▼ In multiplayer games, kill your opponents' worker just after they've gathered resources. They'll drop the goods and you can nab 'em.

CHEATS ▼ During gameplay, hit Enter, then type one of these codes: ▼ !The Sun Also Rises: Removes Fog of War ▼ !Golden Boy: Adds 5,000 resource points to your Clans resource total.

ADMIRAL

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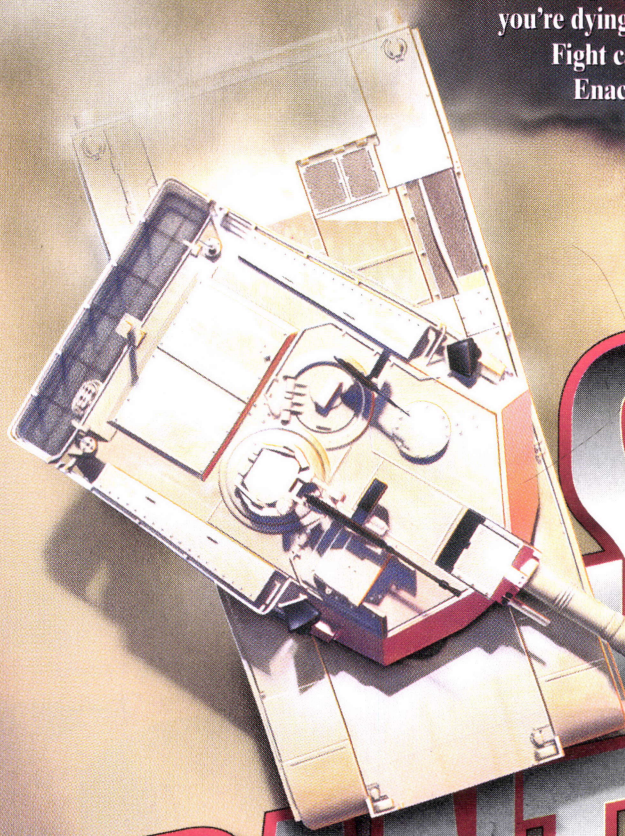


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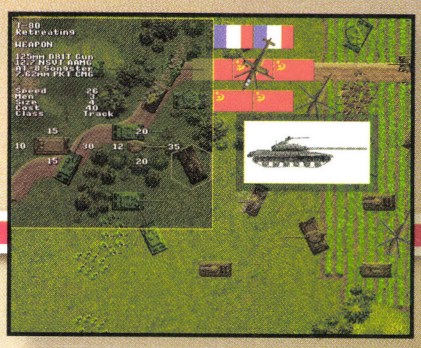
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Blood & Magic

By Barry Brenesal





STRATEGY

Guardians blocking bridges—classic high fantasy.

The Forgotten Realms—quick and easy

Interplay's first foray into TSR's Forgotten Realms world gives D&D fans a taste of the high-fantasy dragon-slaying, spell-weaving exploits that typify their hobby. Set in the kingdom of Doegan, Blood & Magic is a real-time strategy game that's surprisingly easy to learn.

Delving into a strange world of magic and monsters, dungeons and dragons, you begin the quest with a Bloodforge and a basal golem. The Bloodforge acts as a storehouse and distributor of magical energy; the golem is a strange morphing creature. In its stationary pyramid form, the golem gradually generates energy that can be transmitted to the forge. It can also wander around to open up the surrounding terrain. Place the golem next to a foundation (a specialized transforming object, like a crypt) and it changes into any creature you've researched.



Roads make movement easier over tough terrain.

Rangers, mages, zombies, banshees, and furies make up the 16 creature types that the basal golems can assume, each displaying its own benefits and drawbacks. Switching between these forms allows the golem to navigate various terrains—marsh, rivers, mountains, etc.—and deal with the enemies encountered there more effectively. Artifacts found lying about can enhance a creature's abilities in fairly standard ways, such as healing lost hit points, enhancing strength, and increasing movement.



The main screen shows just a small portion of the full map.

Next to all those features, your own options seem a bit slim. There are no spells to learn, structures to create or weapons to forge. You don't harvest resources or form diplomatic relationships. And there's no dialogue between characters. Since there's not much to do, learning how to play isn't particularly difficult. But if you need help, Blood & Magic supplies it via in-game statistics for all the creatures, artifacts, structures, and terrain. There's also a step-by-step tutorial that sees you through the basics of exploration, transformation, research, and fighting.

If you're feeling suitably heroic, you can battle through five clearly defined but unrelated campaigns of varying difficulty, across randomly generated maps. Each campaign offers three scenarios: complete all three successfully, and you win the campaign.

Blood & Magic's fun to play, with a learning curve that's as flat as the Florida landscape. And yet again, the game's a little thin: thin on options, monster types, graphics, spells, scenarios, and worst of all, excitement. Heroes of Might & Magic gave you randomly generated maps, a user map editing and saving facility, selectable AI levels, and adjustable starting resources; you'll get none of these from Blood and Magic. At the same time, Warcraft and Warhammer are both more lavish in the real-time action department.

Visually, this game would have been 2D isometric state-of-the-art about three years ago. It's good-quality VGA at 300-by-200 resolution and 256 colors, but not quite up to the visually appealing level of more recent games like Heroes.

All things considered, Blood & Magic still gets a thumbs up. If you're looking for a real-time fantasy game that takes 15 minutes to learn, you'll enjoy this. The multiplayer option via modem, network or direct link provides a boost to the longevity. But if you want more of a fantasy environment flavor—if you want to actually build that empire, master difficult spells, form alliances, and visit arcane sites—check out some of the other games mentioned before.



Exploring cities is a welcome change from woodland wandering.

BLOOD & MAGIC

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	C-
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

It's no Heroes, but it sure is easy to learn.

PUBLISHER: Interplay
800-468-3775
www.interplay.com
PLATFORM: DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486DX/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 6.1 or Win 95, 2X CD-ROM drive
LIST PRICE: $38

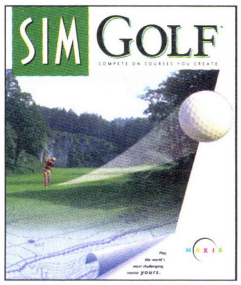
TIPS ▼ Send one or two of your first basal golems stomping down the roads so you can see what's coming at you while you build your forces. ▼ Try to get a map that positions a foundation relatively close to your Bloodforge. This will make it much easier to send basal golems for quick transformation. ▼ Do early research in a form appropriate to your foundation. Meanwhile, send a basal golem to the foundation site. You want one good creature to position on an incoming route, blocking traffic and hindering your opponent's explorations. ▼ Watch your foundations at all times. If they're destroyed, there may be no way to transform your basal golems into much tougher, more effective allies.



TIRED OF THE SAME OLD LINKS?

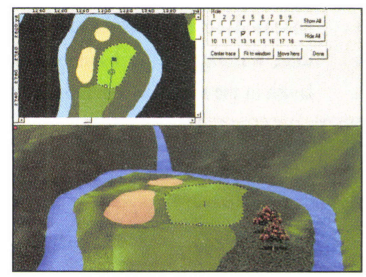


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MAXIS

Solid Ice

By Daniel Morris





SPORTS

Get your nose dirty in scrums along the Plexiglas.

Any sports fan has a huge place in his heart for an underdog. Odds are that if we're not being paid to play our game, we've probably spent some time as the lowman ourselves. That's why it's so sweet to see a gritty club like the Florida Panthers lay claim to a Stanley Cup berth in a shower of plastic rats, or the upstart '92–'93 San Jose Sharks down the monolithic Red Wings and come within a crossbar of the Western Conference final against the Maple Leafs.

The minute that unsightly, ungainly, seemingly hopeless team takes the ice against franchises it has no business even competing with, I'm pulling for the upset. That doesn't mean the upset comes. All too often, the good old college try ends with you flat on your face in a spray of snow shavings.

Strategy First's Solid Ice is an underdog if ever there was one. With competition like NHL '97 and NHL Powerplay '96, putting together a product that can compare is a daunting chore for a small outfit. Solid Ice has a lot of heart and a lot of nice touches separating it from the big boys, but it's half the hockey game.

If it's editability you crave, Solid Ice has it in spades. Sure, there's no NHL license, but you can edit your own team names, locations, uniforms, and even logos. Players are fully editable in several statistical categories.

The view of the action is from the side, a la a television presentation. I hear a lot of people dog this perspective, but I'm not so quick to jump on that bandwagon—I think I'd actually prefer to play PC hockey from the TV side view, if someone would just get around to doing it right. Solid Ice doesn't quite.

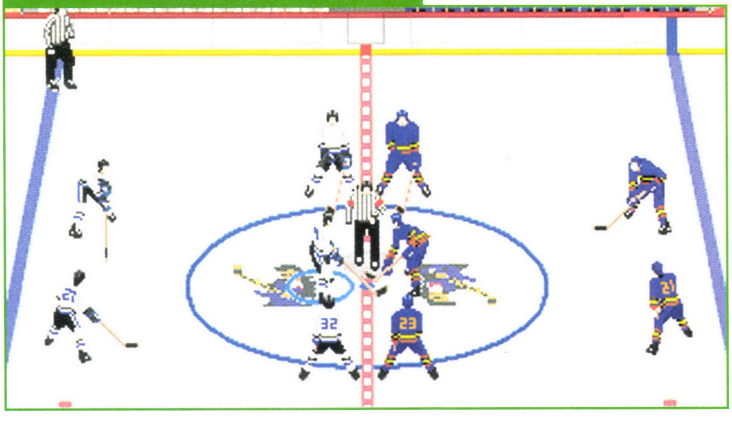


Outta the way, zebra!

In fact, it doesn't hit the mark in any aspect of its graphical presentation. Even in the hi-res mode, everything looks bad: Player animations are weak. The rink is shoddy. The goalie moves like it's his first time on skates.

The word I'd received upon getting the game was that it didn't look like much, but made up for that failing with good AI and gameplay. The word was right about it not looking like much. As for good AI and gameplay, I can say this—it looks like hockey. But the play is defensively unsound to aggravating extremes, allowing breakaway after breakaway. I also found it nearly impossible to conscienciously check opponents. Maybe that's because there's no Check button, just a button to put men in a "checking posture" and then hope for the best. The best you can usually hope for is to hold in the checking posture and skate near a breaking opponent, praying your guy does something useful.

Strategy First shows guts facing off in this league.



Does that sound like a strategy for success in a realistic hockey game? No. And the things that Solid Ice does get right—excellent one-timing tactics, linemates who rarely take you offside, power plays you can actually set up, and penalty kills you'll actually stress over—are wasted by the mind-numbing graphics.

Score one for the big boys

As large a place as I have in my heart for a scrappy underdog, there's no way I can recommend Solid Ice. I wish I could. But it takes more than bravery to make it in this increasingly competitive league. Solid Ice will just have to watch from the press box.

SOLID ICE

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	D+
SOUND CHECK:	C-

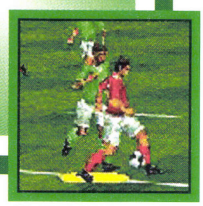
D+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

This hard-working challenger can't hang with computer-hockey pros.

DEVELOPER: Strategy First
PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive
301-916-9302
www.empire-us.com
PLATFORM: DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486DX/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, 2X CD-ROM drive
LIST PRICE: $40

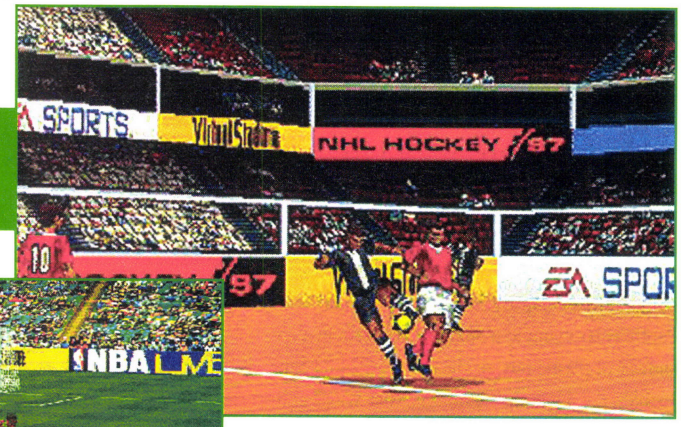
TIPS ▼ Don't commit your defensemen to the offensive rush. If the puck is turned back the other way, your goalie will be left out to dry. ▼ Speaking of which, resist the urge to clear the puck when your goalie controls it. He tends to cough it right back up to the bad guys, leaving him out of position to make the save. ▼ On D, let the goalie worry about the opponent's shot. You worry about the rebound.



SPORTS

FIFA Soccer '97

By Rob Smith



Play indoors for a fast-paced game.



Motion-capturing brings new levels of realism to player movements.

Soccer is a great game. Many sims have failed to do it justice, but FIFA has never failed. And the '97 version is no different.

This year, motion-captured players get the rounded depth of polygons for significantly enhanced realism over the '96 version. This puts the series back on track with VR Soccer in the graphics department while retaining FIFA's superior gameplay.

Get in the game

Eleven leagues composed of nearly 200 teams, complete with accurate 16-player squads, are joined by 64 national teams to provide an amazingly comprehensive festival of soccer. As many as 20 players at once can enjoy this event, although that requires eight local-area-networked machines and a control method that allows you to daisy-chain controllers. A four- or six-button gamepad really helps for pulling off some of the more complex maneuvers, such as the rainbow dribble (the infamous heel-flicking of the ball over your head).

Like FIFA '96, the game's Virtual Stadium technology enabled EA Sports to accurately judge the size and perspective of the players and pitch. As an offshoot of this level of detail, the game uses a control method in which kicking the ball is fine-tuned by the length of time the button is depressed. It's crucial to work out the distance between players and their relative positions.

One major addition is the indoor soccer option. Five-a-side action in the enclosed arena is fast and frenetic, and offers all the options and teams available for playing outdoors.

Enhancing the "watching on TV" feel is the addition to the commentary staff of Des Lynam, frontman of Britain's major network TV soccer show and something of a legend there. John Motson's dulcet tones at the microphone are joined by striker-turned-commentator Andy Gray. Between them, the banter adds more comment on the state of the game, who's leading, and other familiar chatter on top of the straight "x passes to y" routine.

FIFA '97 is packed to the rafters with options; most will be familiar to those who played through the '96 version. The option to transfer players between squads and save these databases for later use is a simple addition that fact-obsessed types will spend hours organizing.

While FIFA '97 is the pinnacle of soccer simdom and will definitely keep me playing all the way till '98, it isn't perfect. The goalkeepers suck, with absolutely no command of the six-yard box, let alone the rest of their area. They punch when they should catch the ball and use their feet all too often—okay for indoor play, but not a standard outdoor tactic. These goofs are interspersed with flashes of pure brilliance as they pull off stunning saves to deny shots that are bound for the top corner.

A slight pause between the players' running-and-passing and shooting animations also hinders fast-paced breaks, making a quick-fire shot in a goal mouth scramble simply impossible. Also, despite the instant-replay feature to view events from any of seven camera angles, you still can't save goals, fouls, or anything else you want for replay at a later date. Note for '98: Make it happen, EA.

For now, the three levels of difficulty, all the variation of the world's teams and their transferrable players, and the overall realism enhanced by top-quality commentary keep FIFA the best soccer game on the market.



Seven camera angles show off the highly detailed polygonal players.

FIFA SOCCER '97

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

Soccer fans—buy it.

PUBLISHER: EA Sports
800-245-4525
www.ea.com

PLATFORM: Win 95/DOS CD

REQUIRES: Pentium 75, 8MB RAM (16MB with Win 95), DOS 5.0 or Win 95, 1MB PCI/VLB graphics card, Sound Blaster 2.0 or compatible

LIST PRICE: $59.95

TIPS

▼ Never trust the goalkeeper to do anything right. Get defenders into the goal area to crowd out attackers. A boot upfield out of danger may not be pretty, but it is effective. ▼ When bearing down on the goal, use the pass button, held down for a second or two, to fire a quick, low shot to a corner. ▼ Jockey with attackers rather than sliding in, or you'll end up stranded with an attacker behind you shooting at the goal. ▼ Since headers from a long way out appear to have the power of normal shots, send a winger down the side, cross the ball, and then switch to an attacker to hit the header button.



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NBA HANG TIME

MIDWAY

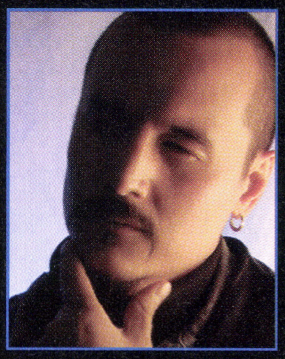
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MIDWAY

BASED ON THE ARCADE HIT

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These testimonials are from some people who have played Soultrap...



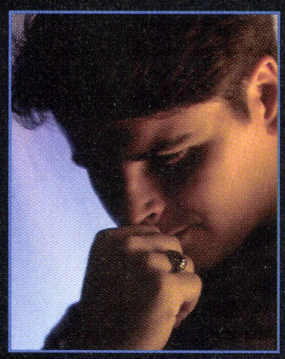
"It's amazingly addictive. Once you start playing you won't be able to stop."



"...I'd expect this kind of game from an arcade or console system, but this is the first time I've really seen it done well for the PC. Two big thumbs up!"

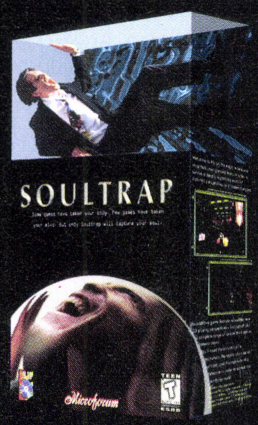


"The fact that I could change camera angles as I played was really cool. There's even a smart camera that picks the best view for you!"



"The soundtrack is incredible, so I love the fact that I can change the music as I play."

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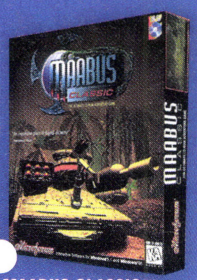
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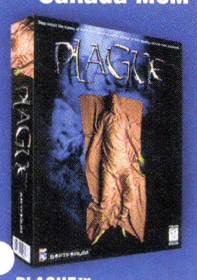
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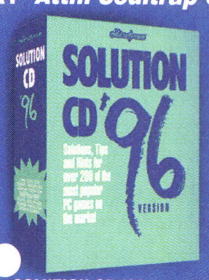
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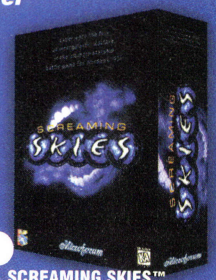
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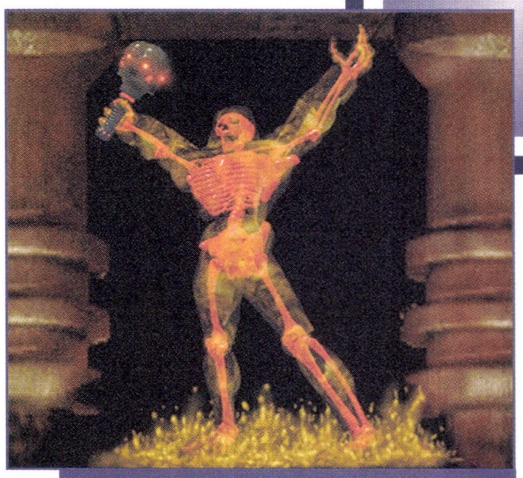
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Hunter Hunted

There can be only one



It's your best chance in years to be a minotaur.

Sidescrolling games are as dead as Dillinger, right? Hunter Hunted may change your mind about that. Sierra has incorporated the staple elements of first-person shooters—with multiplayer deathmatching chief among them—into an innovative little side-view game that's a nice change for action fans suffering from first-person, 2.5D vertigo.

In Hunter Hunted, you play as either a Sly Stallone wannabe or a gargantuan minotaur. As the perfect physical specimen of your species, it's your job to rip your way through a decrepit labyrinth infested with monstrous enemies. Picking up all kinds of destructive implements along the way—from whips to guns to bazookas—you have to prove your worth by being the last man (or thing) left standing.

This game doesn't just scroll to the side; you also move in and out, following tunnels and passageways on a Z-axis through the monitor to appear in a new wing of the labyrinth. The designers didn't waste this feature, either, using it to pull nifty architectural tricks that turn the maze into a brain-busting Rubik's Cube.

While a heavy emphasis is put on the multiplayer experience, there's more ambition than excitement to Hunter Hunted. Two can play at a single machine in a split-screen mode, but you can't help but feel like something's missing—namely, the element of surprise (intentional surprise, since stumbling upon your opponent is the only way to find him). The fact that you're both fighting each other from an omniscient third-person view saps a lot of the energy and anticipation out of a deathmatch. It's still fun to chase the bastard with a bazooka when all he has is a knife, though.

Hunter Hunted may be worth a look for console converts eager to see the first major-league crack at a console-style game getting the PC deathmatch treatment. But it's nothing to keep the LANs humming after hours. *—Daniel Morris*

HUNTER HUNTED

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	C+

Good fun for platform gamers, but it lacks a certain something.

PUBLISHER: Sierra On-Line
800-757-7707
www.sierra.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: Pentium 90, 8MB RAM (16MB rec.), Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: $54

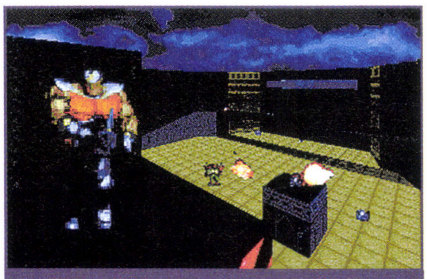
PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

Eradicator

Napalm + mines + brainpower = game

Eradicator offers jaded 3D shooter vets a new twist on this increasingly tired genre. To wit, you're going to have to use your noggin. While Accolade's entry into the action wars isn't groundbreaking in any way, the fact that it offers some new challenges makes it worthy of notice.

The game can be played from first-person or chase view as one of three warriors: the Duke clone Dan Blaze, the sultry Eleena, or the lizard-like Kamchak. At your disposal are some awesome weapons, including a napalm launcher, spider bombs, and mines which you can use to nix a demonoid bad guy's takeover of an enormous city-scale installation.



Sorry, bub, but you're gonna have to think your way out of this one.

More distinctive than the firepower is the brainpower required to navigate Eradicator's levels. There are devious puzzles blocking your way, such as a force field that requires you to find its generator, knock it out, and then scramble back to the disabled field before the generator can repair itself. There are several such obstacles on each level, and they demand ingenuity, stealth, and resourcefulness. It's a refreshing break from the kill-crazy rampages we're used to by now.

The weapons make Eradicator a particularly intriguing multiplayer contest. Over modem or LAN, up to eight players can go at it with a nice array of tactics. Leave mines in a dark hallway, bathe a likely ambush spot with napalm, or send a phalanx of spider bombs marching around a corner in search of live targets. Conveyor belts and elevators are just some of the features of the included level editor.

Eradicator isn't a complete success, and lacks some of the inspiration that can make this type of game (okay, Duke Nukem 3D) a classic. But there's still a lot of stuff here you haven't seen before.

—Daniel Morris

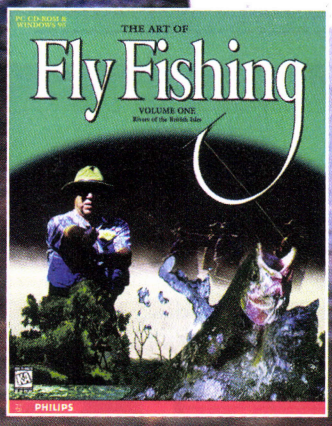
ERADICATOR

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

A heady first-person shooter that's not quite first-level.

PUBLISHER: Accolade
800-245-7744
www.accolade.com
PLATFORM: DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486DX/66 (Pentium rec.), DOS 6.0, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: $49.95

Kicks Bass.





The realistic sights, sounds, psychology and art of fly fishing come to life on CD-ROM, in this challenging multi-level skill game.

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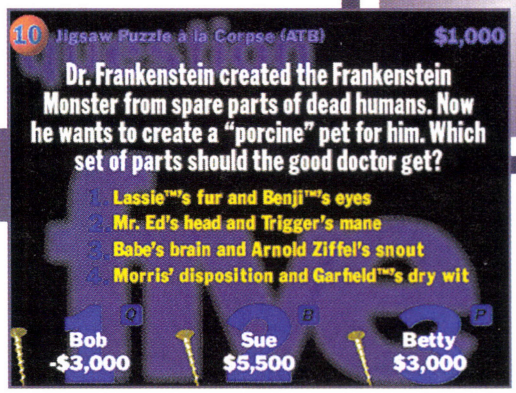
KIDS TO ADULTS
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YOU DON'T KNOW JACK volume 2

Contenders try their hand at the most bizarre trivia ever.



Like all monstrously successful games, last year's smash YOU DON'T KNOW JACK was bound to spawn a sequel or two. On the heels of YOU DON'T KNOW JACK Sports comes YDKJ volume 2, Berkeley Systems' newest round of hilarity.

For those who've missed out, YDKJ lets three players sit around the keyboard while a clever and sarcastic host quizzes them on pop culture. More often than not, the questions are rife with sexual innuendo, with categories like Literature That Makes You Wet Yourself, The National Pastime, and Gettin' Some. The original took the approach that less is more: there was no video of the host, no overwhelming graphics. It was all low-key, but very well done. The music, the wittiness of the questions, and especially the host made it The Game for parties.

This new JACK is a kick in the pants

Volume 2 continues the tradition, adding a few minor enhancements such as picture questions and celebrity appearances from the likes of Tim Allen and Erik Estrada. One major change is that the classic host has been replaced by a Corey Feldman sound-alike—a big mistake. The original host had presence and the ability to sound like he was coming up with clever joke after clever joke off the top of his head. This guy sounds too much like he's reading the material, killing a lot of the genuinely funny lines he's been given.

By tweaking where they shouldn't have, Berkeley's lost some of the original game's feel, making volume 2 an inferior game. On the other hand, it's still a lot better than any trivia game out there, and if you've exhausted YDKJ's questions, you'll definitely want to pick it up. If you haven't tried either game, it should be your mission in life to pick up the original JACK. Don't wait.

—Shane Mooney

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK VOLUME 2

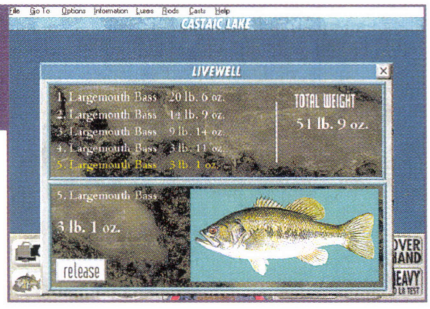
GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B

YDKJ was great, and here's more.

PUBLISHER: Berkeley Systems
800-344-5541
www.berksys.com
PLATFORM: Win/Win 95/Mac CD
REQUIRES: Requires: 486/33, 6MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95, Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: $29.99

Trophy Bass 2

Days like this are few and far between.



Many people who have never fished for bass assume those who do are all beer-swilling, overweight rednecks from tiny towns where dating your sister is not only tolerated, but actively encouraged.

Not true. Professional bass fishing is a big-time sport, with big-time money and even fame to be won. Don't believe me? Just check out the intro to Trophy Bass 2, where professional fishermen lift up their catches for hundreds of fans to go nuts over. Heck, the fact that Sierra is launching a sequel a year after the original says something.

Bite, baby, bite!

Obviously, fishermen such as myself are overjoyed to see such a title, particularly one that's this polished. However, die-hard strategy gamers may also be pleasantly surprised by what they find here. The original Trophy Bass accurately simulated the behavior of bass during the passing seasons, as well as the overall feel of the fishing experience. Lots of strategy is involved in finding the hot spots on these massive lakes during difficult weather conditions, and then there's choosing the right lure...

Yet, a true sense of competition was missing. Not anymore. Yes, Trophy Bass has gone multiplayer, with Internet play (for up to 100 players—check it out on the ImagiNation Network's CyberPark on AOL: **www.inngames.com**), two-player modem capability, and network support for up to 15 players. Now zoom around 10 of America's hottest bass havens and try to outfish your friends. It's not Duke, but it does add some drama to your time on the lake.

Other than the multiplayer options and new lakes, there aren't many changes from the original Trophy Bass. Snags have been added, but they're not realistic, and you still retain the lure on your line when a fish breaks off. Some resource management features, like needing to earn money to buy better boats and fishing equipment, would have been decent additions. Maybe in the third game.

—Steve Klett

TROPHY BASS 2

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

Fishing on a PC don't get much better than this, bubba.

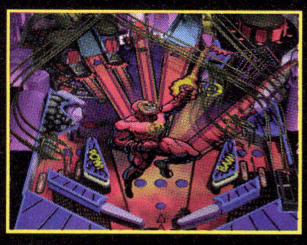
DEVELOPER: Dynamix
PUBLISHER: Sierra On-Line
800-757-7707
www.sierra.com
PLATFORM: Win/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486DX/66, 8MB RAM, Win 3.1 (Win 95 required for multiplayer), Super VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
LIST PRICE: $59.99

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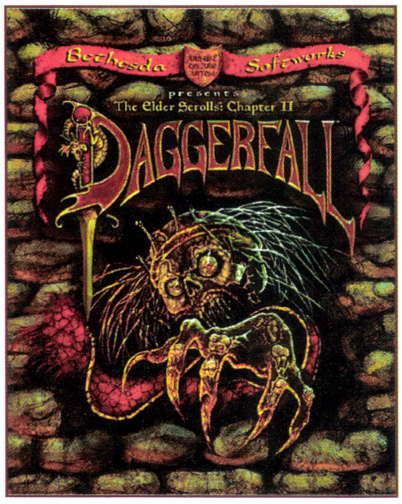




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DAGGERFALL UNCOVERED

STRATEGY & TACTICS

By Barry Brenesal

With its amazing number of quests, dungeons, and character configurations, Daggerfall is a fantasy role-player's dream. But all that complexity can make it a nightmare, too. We're here to help you over the hardest hurdles, with hints that will make you the toast of Tamriel, rather than a toasted body dropped off at the front gate.



Action and exploration help you advance.

Choosing a Profession

Your first big decision is choosing one of the game's 18 professions. Combat and magic skills are essential, so pick a career that gives some emphasis to both. Nightblades (a mixture of mage and thief) and Battlemages (a mixture of mage and warrior) are the easiest roles to play—not that either is a piece of cake.

If you'd rather "roll your own," give yourself at least one primary or major skill that's magical (preferably Thaumaturgy) and another that's weapons-based. Characters skilled in Thaumaturgy can purchase the Levitate spell for far less cash and use fewer spell points casting it. Levitate lets you move over (or down into) pits, go through holes above you, avoid foes, and on occasion, move directly to the object of a quest without working through 50 or 60 monsters.

Of the eight character attributes, Agility is the most combat-useful. It figures into the number of attacks you get, how well you hit, and how adeptly you avoid being hit. Sacrifice a few Personality and Endurance points at the start, and stick them in your hero's Agility. Raising your Agility level should be a priority early on, whatever your profession. Later you can work on Intelligence, Strength, Speed, and Willpower.



Wanna wander Tamriel as a wereboar? Roll the dice.

Level Advancement

If you think you've got enough experience to move up a level, click on your inventory screen. That will trigger your advancement. But first, save your game. Your character randomly acquires 4 to 6 attribute points each level, and who wants to settle for anything on the low end? Keep loading that saved game and the inventory screen until you hit the big 6.

Your three primary and three major skills start at a higher level and advance more quickly than your other skills, so be sure to put at least one weapons skill in there. Add a less vital skill that you'll use often, like Running. If you run through town all the time, this skill should constantly advance, helping you increase faster in levels.

How do you gain experience in magic skills if you don't need to use them? Simple: Cast passive spells like Heal, Stamina, Chameleon, and Levitate right before you rest, whether you need them or not.

Guild Advancement

Advancement in any of Daggerfall's many guilds takes time. Each guild level requires a minimum Reputation of +10/level. You gain 5 Reputation points every time you succeed on a guild quest,



Head into towns to find the guilds, a vital source of help.



If you hate wasting time, avoid the dungeon quests.

but lose a point with all factions in the kingdom with each passing month (if you're not keeping busy, no one's hearing about you, so your reputation fades). So three successful quests per guild is typically the minimum necessary to advance.

Your character also needs good skill ratings in two areas that any particular guild teaches. Remember, if you can't get enough training in a particular skill, you can always go to a dungeon, stock up on goodies, sell them in town, and pay to train at the guild. It takes time and money, but you've got both—until you set off on the central quests.



Stock up on goodies in the dungeons.

Quests

Daggerfall's main quests send you into some of the roughest dungeons this side of Chicago. But nobody's telling you to start off with the baddest monsters around. Work up a bunch of levels first, taking on small quests from the guilds. Build up your reputation and develop some very good stats, armor, weaponry, and spells.

Be wary, but don't avoid dungeons: they're an excellent source of revenue when you're not under a deadline. Just hang close to the entrance, kill monsters wielding weapons and armor, and then drop off the gear at the entrance.

The Mage, Fighter, and Temple guilds are your best sources of quests. You'll have to work yourself up through each guild's ranks, but it pays off: you can make enchanted weapons in the Fighter Guild, create your own spells or summon powerful demons in the Mage Guild, and purchase or make potions in some of the temples.

Quests vary. Turning one down costs you nothing; accepting and not fulfilling it has a small cost. In general, avoid dungeon quests, since these are time-consuming and sometimes nearly impossible to solve. Stick with simple quests to locate somebody in a distant town, rid a residence of monsters, or best of all, protect a meditating mage from The Dark Brotherhood for three hours.

When defending a mage, hang out near the front door. Around the end of the first hour, three attackers will enter. Keep your weapon out, and be swift. Success is crowned by an enchanted object or a valuable gem.



Yeah, you can take this guy, but you'll want dwarven weaponry for the Undead.

Battle Hints

Avoid tackling the Undead until you've got dwarven weaponry or better: many of these creatures are resistant to weapons made from steel, silver, or iron. Wounds from the Undead also have a number of unpleasant side effects, including disease, lycanthropy, and vampirism.

Most creatures of a certain kind have identical opening attacks. Rangers will shoot at you from a distance, so close with them at once. Battlemages will cast Invisibility, so strike quickly and furiously at the last place you saw them.

If there are multiple enemies in one room, stand by the door so they can only attack you one-on-one. When things get hairy, retreat, find a quiet spot, close the door, and sleep until healed.

You won't lose items if you don't instantly grab them off a corpse. Come back later if you're bogged down.

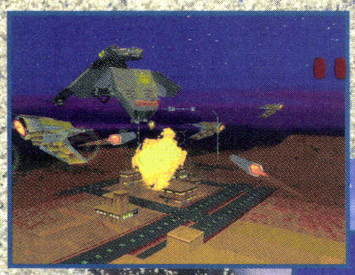
Eventually, you'll want to buy a wagon to hold all your collected gear. These carts have to be parked at dungeon entrances, but you can always return there periodically to pile up all the loot.

Fight multiple attackers one at a time.



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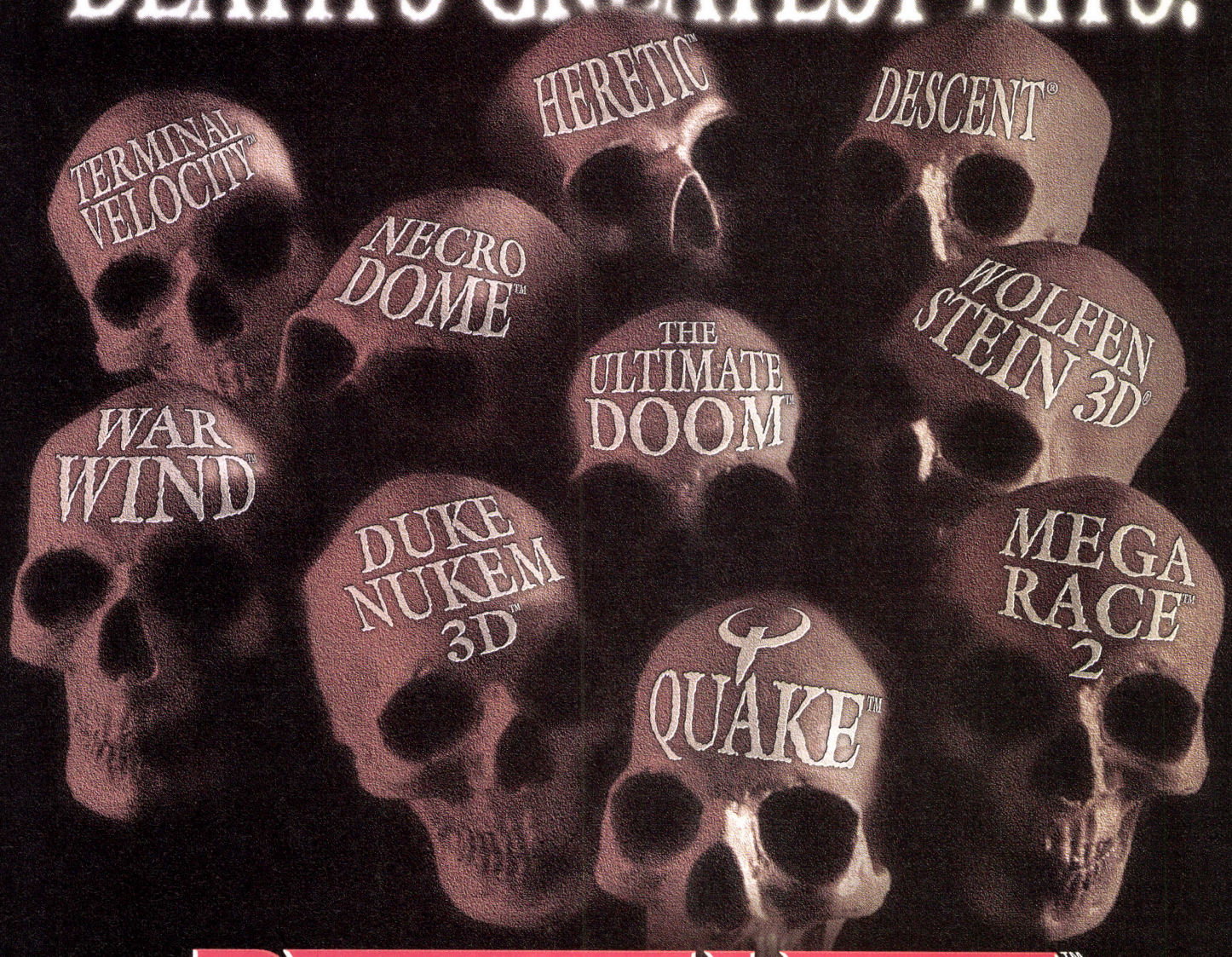
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STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

We're weary-eyed, carpal-tunnel gameboys, and we love ya. So here's Resolution #106 for 1997: to keep you current with all the coolest, latest codes. This month, a mix of action, strategy, and driving sims. Storm the strongholds of man or woman with these deadly Gender Wars cheats. Roadhogs, tap those fingers to check out bonus cars and all of the tracks in the blistering Screamer 2. Stuck in Time Commando or Shattered Steel? Not anymore. You'll be crushing metal and leaping through the ages in, um, no time. What can we say? Enjoy!

Screamer 2



From the Options (main) menu, type these codes:

MRTRK: Makes all tracks available.

TACAR: Bonus car.

TBCAR: Bonus car.

TCCAR: Bonus car.

TDCAR: Bonus car.

Time Commando



Use these passwords at the Password screen:

	Normal	Hard
Roman Empire:	QJSLVABL	SOIOLGNK
Japanese Middle Age:	KAYAGEAF	TFJSVJMC
European Middle Age:	MZFSPQDD	XFYAMXIE
Conquistadors:	AVMJFGGU	ZOVASAIV
Wild West:	EVBSVTCV	BODSGWLW
Modern Wars:	YLHHGXBO	VEJHMQKO
Future:	ALPYPJFO	ZEYPCEHQ
Beyond Time:	YBULVABN	HMFDLGNN

Shattered Steel

During gameplay, hit Enter, then type one of the following:

GONZLES: Makes bot fast.

RAGNAROK: Blows player bot's head off.

SMITE: Destroys your target.

CAPONE: Spawns five gnats to help you.

HENCHMAN: Spawns a shiva to help you.

FNORD: 120 Howitzer.

CLEESE: Screws up bot animation.

BLIPPLE BLOOPS: Rapid laser.



NUMBER CHANGER: Rolling mine.



CGQ: Large rocket eight-pack.

GFY: Small rocket 18-pack

BCUA: Large rocket 18-pack.

DINGLEBERRY: Heavy laser.

BUMSAUCE: Heavy rapid laser.

NAPALMINTHEMORNING: Gives you a mine.

KICKSOMEBUTT: Heavy plasma, two 64-packs of small rockets.

TINKERBELL: Nova weapon.

HARDCODE: 30mm gat.

BIGONES: 70mm gat.

STOOL MINE LAUNCHER

PYROTEK: Gives you a mine.

LOCKANDLOAD: Gives all weapons max ammo.

IMOUTTAHERE: Wins mission.

RODRIGO: Spawns two light choppers to help.

MONKEYSLUNCH: Alters textures.

CHERNOBYL: Nuke.

TELEPORT <1-512><1-512>: Takes you to any position on map.

Gender Wars

To use the cheats:

(1) Start a normal game.

(2) Go to the Options screen.

(3) Select Save Game.

(4) Then, in any slot, type:

BUY A PLAYSTATION: God mode—invulnerability, infinite energy, weapons

WORLD OF FISH: Lets you access any level (1–14)

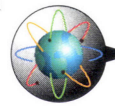
(5) Hit Enter.

(6) From the Options screen, select Quit To Titles.

(7) Start a new game.

(8) Pick men or women.

(9) Follow the onscreen directions.



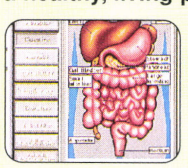
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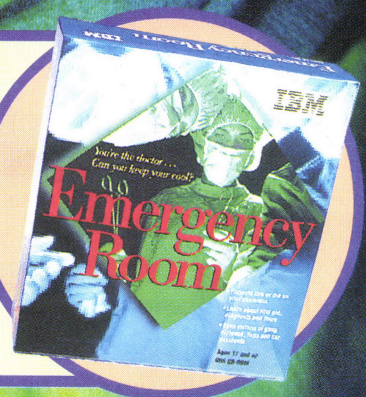


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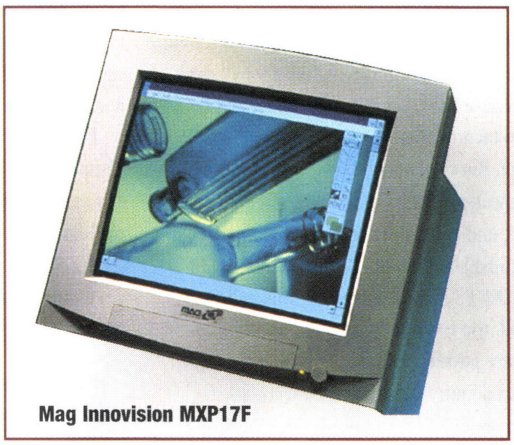


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By David Gerding

Visions of Pentiums Dance in Their Heads...

It's the holiday season—the time of year when we think of others (how can we persuade them to buy us gifts we *really* want?), of goodwill toward men (how good *will* those presents be?) and of replacing our PCs with the latest and greatest...which we think about all year, anyway, so there's no sense in stopping just for the holidays, right?

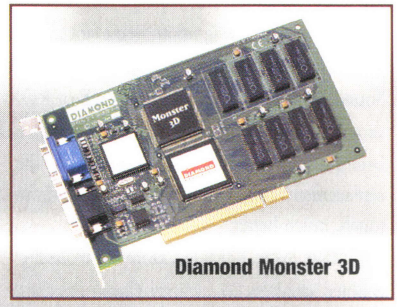


Mag Innovision MXP17F

To get into the high-tech holiday spirit, we've rounded up all the top gear to build a pair of nearly perfect PCs. Yes, it's hard work playing with the latest and greatest hardware for hours on end. We blasted each other in Duke deathmatches. We seared our eyeballs gazing at incredible 3D-accelerated graphics. We shattered our nerves experiencing muscle-CPU performance on games that the rest of you won't see until 1997. But, hey, it's the holidays, and we're willing to make those big sacrifices to bring this very special gift to you. Now, is that Christmas spirit, or what?



SideWinder Gamepad



Diamond Monster 3D

Our first system is for the money-is-no-object crowd. We call it the *PC of the Gods*, a setup that's truly greater than the sum of its amazing parts. This is what all loyal *PC Games* readers (and editors) truly deserve. For those for whom money most certainly is an object, we offer the *PC of the Gods Who Are Nearing Their VISA Limit*, a system that is sure to thrill all but the most affluent of game aficionados.

The PC of the Gods

The Core System

- Intel Pentium 200 with MMX (P55C)
- 64MB EDO RAM
- 4 PCI expansion slots
- Universal Serial Bus (USB) support

We chose a Micronics motherboard model M55Hi as the base for the system. Micronics has a great reputation, and this board delivers the latest in high-performance specs, including more PCI slots, which will come in handy in '97 when more cards—especially sound cards—make the jump to PCI. The USB support on the machine takes a little imagination (and faith): While there aren't many USB peripherals right now, we believe there will be in a couple of months, and with the Micronics, you'll be ready for them. The ability to chain your peripherals will be worth it.

The processor, a 200MHz MMX-enabled Pentium, means you'll be ready for all the MMX 'wares, game and otherwise, that appear in the happy new year. MMX is really going to accelerate all things multimedia on the PC once the programmers have retooled their code for the new technology. Games will suddenly get bigger color palettes at higher resolutions. (Ever tire of the brown-gray color scheme in Quake?) Sure, the systems won't be out until late January, and MMX-enabled titles may take even longer. But we think the wait is worth it.



Iomega Zip Drive

Finally, a huge, heaping 64MB helping of fast EDO RAM prepares you for a world where Windows 95 memory-hog gaming is the norm. If you can find a system with the newer Synchronous DRAM, get it instead. Synchronous DRAM is even faster than EDO, although paying more than about a 10-percent premium over EDO memory probably isn't worth it. But this is the PC of the Gods! Just say "Charge it."

The Drives

- Western Digital 3.1GB
- Adaptec SCSI Controller 2940UW
- Iomega Jaz
- Iomega Zip
- Pioneer 12X CD-ROM

The hard drive is your basic Western Digital EIDE

drive, but huge! The whopping 3.2GB model is our favorite. It's a BIG drive. Western Digital's products are fast, reliable, and deliver serious bang for the buck.

When you can't get bigger, go for faster. On the CD-ROM front, we're speeding up to Pioneer's 12X CD-ROM drive. This thing spins so fast it has an anti-vibration mechanism to keep it from literally hopping across the desktop! And DVD-ROM's slow path to the market means the Pioneer will be worthwhile for some time to come.

For some extra "portable storage," Santa's popping for Iomega's SCSI-based Zip and Jaz drives, which store 100MB and 1GB, respectively, on cartridges you can put in your pocket. To make sure these units perform at peak efficiency, we pick Adaptec's 2940UW SCSI adapter, which offers top-of-the-line Wide SCSI performance.

The Display System

- Matrox Millennium
- MGA MediaXL-MPEG
- MGA Media TV
- Orchid Righteous 3D or Diamond Monster 3D
- Mag Innovision 17" XP17F Monitor

We think our display system reflects real genius. We start with the Matrox Millennium, still one of the best all-around Windows and DOS 2D accelerators. Then we add the MediaXL MPEG card, which endows the Matrox with hardware MPEG playback and video capture. We also slap on the MGA Media TV card, a TV tuner that'll let you watch TV on the desktop. (We're tired of craning our necks around to watch those *Max Headroom* reruns on the 19-incher across the room.)

For 3D, we recommend either the Righteous 3D or the Diamond Monster 3D. Which one to get? Since performance is similar on each board, base your selection on the software bundle you prefer. Both boards use the Voodoo 3D graphics chip, which delivers 3D graphics even better than those of Rendition-based boards. Plus, you get to keep your existing 2D card.

For the monitor, we step up to a Mag Innovision MXP17F, a knockout 17-incher with a host of neat features. (Even we didn't have the heart to hit Santa for a 21-inch monitor.) This unit made the cut for its quality, its support of hi-res (1600-by-1200) for playing super-hi-res games like Links LS, and its great price. An LCD walks you through customizing settings so you can get the highest refresh rate at various resolutions, which is easier on the eyes. Also, this isn't one of those multimedia-ready monitors with built-in speakers. The system of the gods must have separate speakers, so why get "built-ins" that you're going to turn off?

Sound and Modem

- Creative Phone Blaster PnP 33.6
- Yamaha DB50XG MIDI Adaptor
- Altec Lansing ACS55 with Dolby Multimedia Surround

Our unusual choice for a sound card isn't a sound card at all, but a multifunction "telephony" card from Creative Labs. The Creative Phone Blaster PnP 33.6 incorporates onboard Sound Blaster 16 hardware. But the Phone Blaster also includes full duplex speakerphone functionality, voice mail with caller ID, and the highest conventional modem speed available today—33.6Kbps. While Sound Blaster's AWE32 is still technically the audio king of the hill, too few games take advantage of its proprietary positional audio features. We'd rather be able to do nifty Computer Phone Tricks.

What about MIDI and wavetable? We've got you covered. We recommend the Yamaha DB50XG daughtercard; it plugs into your Phone Blaster without taking up an extra slot in your system. This card outdoes the MIDI you'll get from a Sound Blaster AWE32, sporting 4MB of ROM samples, twice that of the AWE32. Yamaha has been pushing its MIDI XG "standard" as the replacement for General MIDI. They're right—it's much, much better.

Finally, Altec Lansing's Dolby Surround–enabled speakers use cleverly placed drivers to dunk you in audio as immersive as a three-speaker setup can get. The next step up from here is home theater, a big step even for gods.

The Controllers

- Microsoft Intellipoint Mouse
- Thrustmaster F22
- Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad
- Thrustmaster T2 Steering Control

Face it: when it comes to playing games, the stick's the thing. And the mouse...and the steering wheel. Every game genre has its own ideal input device. Our conclusion? Get 'em all.

For the mouse, we specify the Microsoft Intellipoint. It may not be flashy, but it's functional and very comfortable. A great stocking stuffer.

Our pick for joystick is the new Thrustmaster F22, the crown jewel of 'sticks. This controller has a feel unlike any other. It screams quality, it's totally programmable, and it has enough buttons and flexibility to keep the most hardcore PC games fanatic satisfied. (We're taking a wait-and-see position on CH Products' new force-feedback stick. We need to save something for '97.)

For platform games and shooters, nothing beats a gamepad. Microsoft has the winner with its new SideWinder Gamepad. Great feel, programmability under Windows 95, and the ability to daisy-chain up to four of the pads for multiplayer action make it our top choice.

For hard-driving excitement, we want the Thrustmaster T2 steering control. This is the high-end unit that includes separate shift and accelerator/brake controls. It's simply more compelling to steer a car in a driving game with a steering wheel. Go figure! Monster Truck Madness and IndyCar II come alive!

THE GODLY SYSTEM

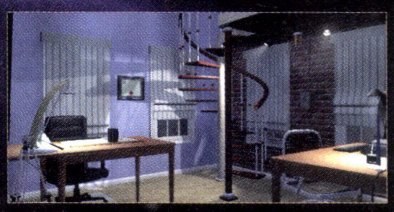
CORE SYSTEM	PRICE
Intel Pentium 200 with MMX (P55C), Micronics Motherboard (64MB EDO RAM, 4 PCI, USB, and all the bells and whistles)	About $2,900
Adaptec SCSI Controller 2940UW	$290
DISPLAY SYSTEM	
Matrox Millennium	$199
MediaXL-MPEG	$299
TV Tuner	$119
Mag Innovision 17"	$700
CONTROLLERS	
Thrustmaster F22	$160
SideWinder Gamepad	$39
Thrustmaster T2 Steering Control	$119
Microsoft Intellipoint Mouse	$70
DRIVES	
Western Digital 3.1GB	$350
Iomega Jaz	$500
Iomega Zip	$200
Pioneer 12X CD-ROM	$200
SOUND & TELEPHONY	
Phone Blaster 33.3 PnP	$270
Yamaha DB50XG	$170
Altec Lansing ACS55 with Dolby Multimedia Surround	$199
THE GRAND TOTAL (AND WE MEAN GRAND!)	**$6,784**

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The PC of the Gods Who Are Nearing...

(you know the rest)

The Core System

- Intel Pentium 166
- 32MB EDO RAM

While we'd rather not recommend anything less than an MMX-enabled Pentium, we live in the same world of annoying credit limits as the rest of you. The 166 with this much RAM is a good place to start. Besides, when it comes to MMX, Intel has hinted there will be MMX Overdrive chips available down the road, so if MMX becomes an absolute must, you can make the upgrade then.

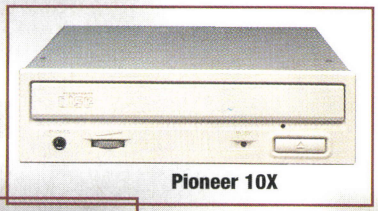


Princeton Ultra 17+

The Drives

- Western Digital 2.5GB
- Pioneer 10X CD-ROM

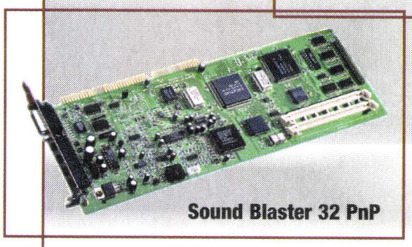
Western Digital's 2.5GB drive is a bit smaller than the 3.1GB drive in the PC of the Gods, and it's easier on the pocketbook. It offers the same great performance and reliability, including toll-free tech support for those who need help with the installation.



Pioneer 10X



F-16 Combat Stick



Sound Blaster 32 PnP

The Pioneer 10X has been around a little longer than the 12X and is a good value if you can still find one on store shelves. (There should be other 10X drives in this price range.) Just how cool is the 10X? We can say with confidence that it's more than twice as cool as 4X drives.

The Display System

- Any Rendition-based graphics cards (including Creative, Sierra, Intergraph, etc.)
- Princeton Ultra 17+

These Rendition boards are more than merely excellent. They offer awesome 3D performance, top-notch VGA performance for DOS games, and solid Windows performance—all on cards you can buy for around $200. Also—and this is important for *PC Games* readers—the Rendition is the only chip so far that supports Quake natively. Indeed, Quake fans may forego our "Perfect PC" recommendation of a 3Dfx-based board in favor of these Rendition boards just for the opportunity to toast hi-res Shamblers.

For the monitor, we chose the Princeton Ultra 17+, a solid 17-inch display that's Plug and Play–compatible at a very affordable price. If you're an avid gamer, we can't recommend gaming at less than 17 inches anymore.

The Controllers

- CH F-16 Combat Stick

This solid stick is sure to meet the needs of most flight-sim fans while serving duty as a standard joystick. The great thing about it is that it's well-built and fully programmable, for less money than comparable Thrustmaster gear.

Sound

- Creative Labs Sound Blaster 32 PnP

The Sound Blaster 32 PnP is an excellent gift for the audio-inclined. It's not Creative's top-of-the-line AWE32, but many of the features on the AWE32 go unused by today's games anyway, so why pay more? Wavetable synthesis—a requirement for any serious gamer—is standard.

Modem

- U.S. Robotics Sportster 33.6

The point here isn't features; it's getting you connected to the Net and other gamers head-to-head at the highest possible speeds. U.S. Robotics remains a price-performance leader among modem-makers. Although many phone lines can't provide 33.6Kbps rates reliably, we feel it's important to be covered on the high end. Once you're connected, you can never get enough bandwidth. Best of all, the Sportster 33.6 will be upgradeable to conform to U.S. Robotics' recently announced X2 technology, which promises to allow Sportster modems to run at a wailing 56Kbps next year. ■

THE DEMI-GODLY SYSTEM

CORE SYSTEM	PRICE
Intel Pentium 166 with 32MB EDO RAM	$1,800
DISPLAY SYSTEM	
Rendition-based card (Creative, Intergraph, Sierra, etc.)	About $200
Princeton Ultra 17+	$600
CONTROLLERS	
CH Products F-16 Combat Stick	$95
DRIVES	
Western Digital 2.5GB	$280
Pioneer 10X CD-ROM	$180
SOUND & TELEPHONY	
Sound Blaster 32 PnP	$170
MODEM	
U.S. Robotics Sportster 33.6	$160
THE STILL-VERY-GRAND TOTAL	**$3,485**





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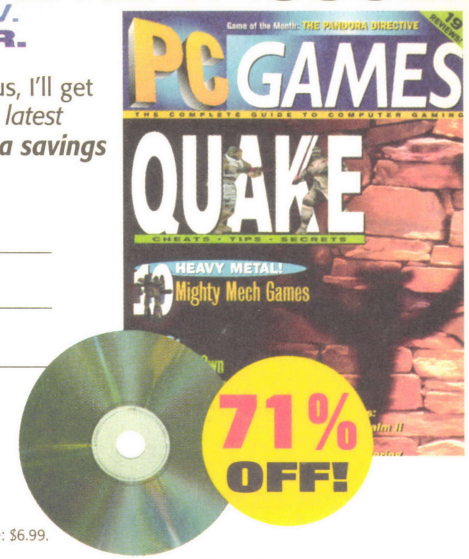
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All..... About.....Latency

By David Gerding

Dukematches are too slow. Why is that? Why is there no reaction when I hit buttons? I've got a top modem but I keep getting toasted. What's happening across the phone lines and through the servers?

First, get this straight: The Internet simply wasn't designed to let you play against 15 other people in a Quake deathmatch. It was designed to keep bits (information bits, that is) moving from point A to point B and back in spite of network inconsistencies—inconsistencies like, say, a 50-megaton nuclear warhead inconveniently removing the Midwest. Before the Internet was the Internet, it was the Arpanet, created by and for the military to withstand nuclear war.

Every packet of information moving across the Internet carries with it information about which machine it came from and to which machine it's headed. That way, when the big bombs started going off, and whole parts of the network went permanently offline, the information being sent by the unfortunate survivors would bounce around until it arrived at the intended destination.

Unfortunately, the very flexibility that makes the Internet terrific in the event of nuclear holocaust means that your precious game data meanders its way from point A to point B. The biggest problem facing online gamers is latency—the time it takes information created on one computer to be sent to another computer, and a response sent back to the first computer. Because there's no "fixed path" for data to travel on the Internet, there's no way to predict from one moment to the next just how bad latency will be. While latency is usually measured in milliseconds (thousandths of a second), this lag sometimes exceeds a second, which slows things down so much that games are unplayable or quit altogether.

Understanding Latency

The first thing to understand is that you can't "fix" latency completely. Electrons carrying bits move through wires at the speed of light, which is fixed at 186,000 miles per second. Things only move faster on *Star Trek*. This means that in a perfect point-to-point communication system, with Earth about 25,000 miles round, the very best latency one could achieve with a competitor on the opposite side of the planet would be about 13 milliseconds (ms), or about 75 "conversations" per second. The thing to remember is that because of the speed of light, nobody can give you "latency-free" gaming. Sadly, the reality of latency is far worse than this ideal.

Latency is the sum of many parts. For example, consider TEN's average of 225ms latency. According to TEN's chief technology officer, Dave King, most of the latency happens not in the network, but in the modem. Remember, it takes time for the modem to take the bits your computer sends it and translate those bits into audio signals that are sent over the phone network. In fact, that translation process accounts for more than half of the latency in TEN's 225ms average. If games could work with the paltry amount of bandwidth available at 2400 baud, they would actually achieve better latency figures because less time would be spent in the modem! In a game like Duke, the packets of information are a mere 20 bytes, and clever game designers might go this route in the near term.

The remaining time in the latency pool is 80ms of the bits traveling the network there and back, plus another 10ms on both the sending and receiving machines—not bad figures by any standard.



What You Can Do

If you want the shortest latencies, play head to head via a "null modem" against a friend on a computer sitting next to yours, or via a modem connection with someone who lives next door. Better yet, play on a network in your office with people in your office. Why? Remember, modems increase latency and distance increases latency.

TEN, for example, plans to have a regional business model eventually to try to achieve latencies of around 150 to 160 versus the current 200+ figure. It's all a matter of lessening distance.

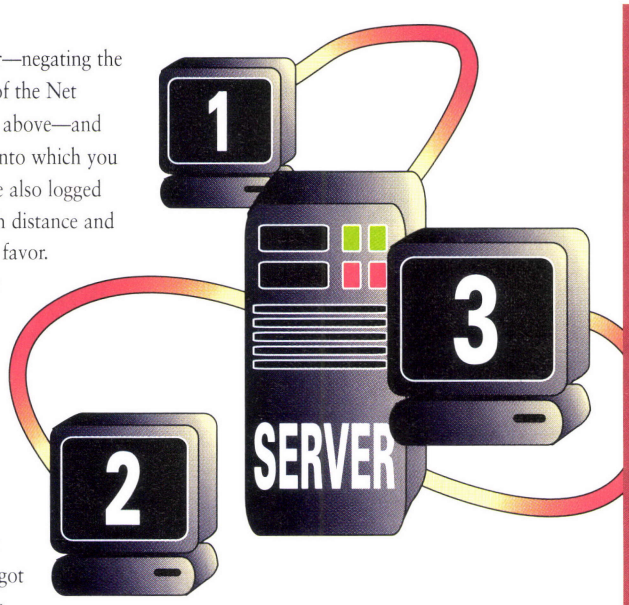
If your goal is to play with multiple people and you are using a modem, your lowest-latency solution is going to be a regional dial-in server architecture like that implemented by DWANGO. DWANGO avoids the Internet

altogether—negating the vagaries of the Net described above—and places game servers in major cities into which you can dial and compete against people also logged onto that server. This setup has both distance and network architecture working in its favor. The bits travel less distance because all the players are geographically proximate, and the network pipes are dedicated to one thing—getting your bits to the other players as fast as possible.

If you want the scope of games and players currently available only on the major national networks like TEN, Mplayer, and Engage, you've got two choices. Most of these networks have preferred Internet service providers (ISP) that have promised to give game players' data special treatment, so that some of the Internet latency problems are avoided. Some of these networks also make direct-dial numbers available, which avoids the Internet, but you'll pay a modest premium to use them.

When choosing an ISP with an eye for multiplayer gamers, your best bet is a major national provider. The national providers are usually fewer "hops" away from the major backbones of the Net, which means your bits move more directly. Ask your service provider how many "hops" they are away from the following major Internet pipes: MAE East, MAE West, NY NAP, SF NAP, or Chicago NAP. If they're more than two hops away, you'll probably want to look elsewhere.

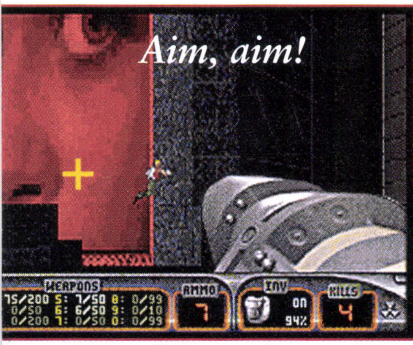
Remember, in a multiplayer game, the "world" is usually only as fast as the weakest link. Fast processors and a fast, high-quality modem will not only improve your experience, but everyone else's as well. Some networks group players based on latency, so if your hardware is fast, you'll be paired up with others who have fast hardware—yet another incentive to upgrade.



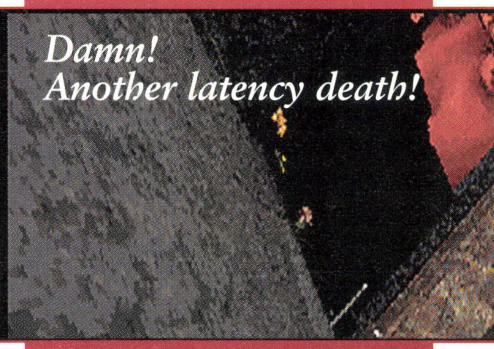
Why Do I Miss So Often?

Player on machine 1 fires a rocket. That signal is sent down to the server and then out to the other machines in the game. They rebound the signal to allow the program to complete its instruction and keep the action moving.

Let's say machine 2 has a good connection and rebounds machine 1's shot information almost instantly. Machine 2 would be in position to respond, move, fire, whatever, maintaining the flow that's so vital to the fun.







The Future

What does the future hold? In the short term, modem-makers paying attention to the games market might create a new generation of faster "latency-reducing" modems, though such technology will probably be eclipsed by newer all-digital technologies that avoid the translation-latency introduced by modems.

Even new technologies such as U.S. Robotics' recently announced X2 range of modems, sporting speeds up to 56K, are not going to significantly reduce the effects of latency, as the bandwidth available for data remains the same. Incorporating Digital Signal Processors (DSP) into modems, which convert the signals far faster, would be a definite starting place.

Other options available today, such as ISDN cards, add less than half the amount of milliseconds to the latency total than do existing modems. Down the road, cable modems will reportedly introduce a mere 6ms of latency into the equation. Better, but not perfect. As more than one multiplayer-game designer has been heard grumbling, "The speed of light sucks."

But problems occur when machine 3 has more of a dodgy connection. Say it receives the message from machine 1 and takes five times longer than machine 2 to respond. Everyone then has to wait for machine 3 to rebound its signal back through the server and out to everyone. This delay is the "lag."

Quake has a significantly advanced server based model. Rather than have all the information about a game running on all the machines taking part, as in Duke, Quake sets one machine aside as the server. The game is run from that machine with other machines getting the information they require without all the details being sent to every player in the game. It's a kind of "need-to-know" system: the server tells each machine just what it needs to know, without the unnecessary extra information that would slow down response times.


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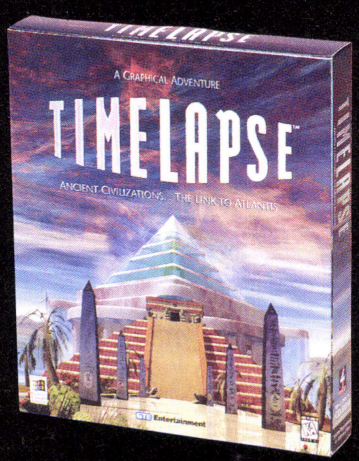
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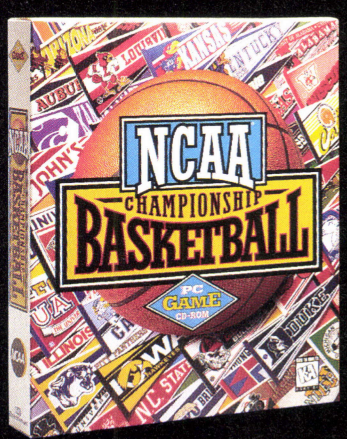
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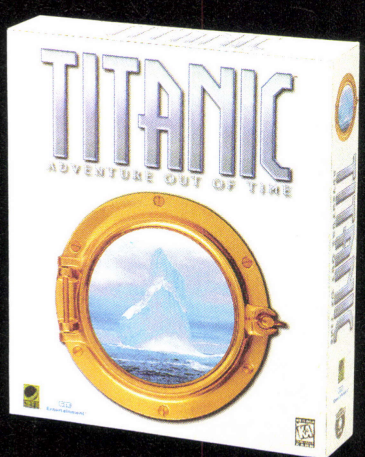
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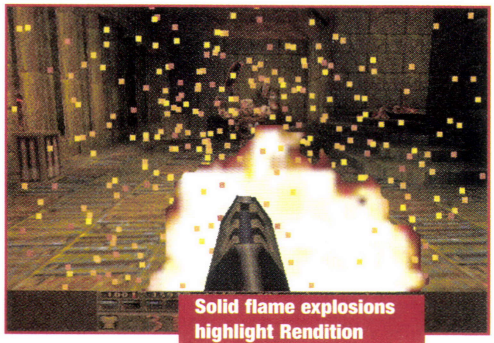
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Solid flame explosions highlight Rendition power in Quake.

3D Options

Creative's 3D Blaster card (reviewed in the November issue, page 174) was the first of a flurry of 3D graphics cards to sport Rendition's Vérité V1000 chip set. It's quickly been joined on the shelves by Intergraph's Reactor 3D and Sierra's Screamin' 3D. Because each card is essentially the same in hardware compatibility, purchasing decisions are based heavily on the bundled software. Here's the deal on the options:

Screamin' 3D

OVERALL: A

Despite having a background in the hardware market from the Aztech sound card days, Sierra's entry into this fray was still a surprise. But with a healthy line-up of its own games to support its hardware, the company's decision makes sense.

Installation was a breeze—Windows 95 plug-and-play actually worked—and the drivers were upgraded without fuss. A strong bonus for Sierra is the use of Canopus Software's optimized drivers. With virtually identical hardware, these drivers help to enhance the card's performance in 2D—an area found wanting in most 3D accelerators. (Sierra; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com; $199)

Bundled software:
- IndyCar II (full version)
- Silent Thunder (full version)
- CyberGladiators (full version)
- Quake 1.06 (shareware with Rendition patch)

Reactor 3D

OVERALL: A-

Intergraph's Reactor boasted the same simple installation and setup as the Screamin' 3D. Without the enhancement of the Canopus drivers, the Reactor showed no significant boost to performance in DOS. With the prevalence of Windows 95 games, this shouldn't be a major problem.

New drivers are being made available for free download from Intergraph's Web site when available. Backed by excellent company support and customer service, Intergraph has a strong position in this crowded market. (Intergraph; 800-763-0242; www.ingr.com/ics/reactor; $149 until Dec. 31, $199 list price)

Bundled software:
- IndyCar II (full version)
- Quake 1.06 (shareware with Rendition patch)
- Hellbender (trial version)
- Monster Truck Madness (trial version)

Gaming Hardware Hall of Fame

Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy. Just check *PC Games*' running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.

CATEGORY	PRODUCT	DETAILS	OUR RATING
PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000	A
Monitor	Nokia Valugraph 447L	Nokia; 800-296-6542; $699	B+
CD-ROM drive	Toshiba TXM3501E1	Toshiba; 714-457-0777; price not available	B+
Sound card	AWE32	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $249.95	A
Speakers	SoundWorks	Cambridge SoundWorks; 800-367-4434; $219	A+
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 619-598-2518; $69.95	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder gamepad	Microsoft; 206-882-8080; $39	A+
Modem	Supra 28.8	Supra; 800-727-8772; $219 internal, $299 external	A
Graphics card	Screamin' 3D	Sierra; 800-757-7707; $199	A
Key add-on	NEC MultiSync M700 monitor	NEC; 800-632-4636; $899	A-

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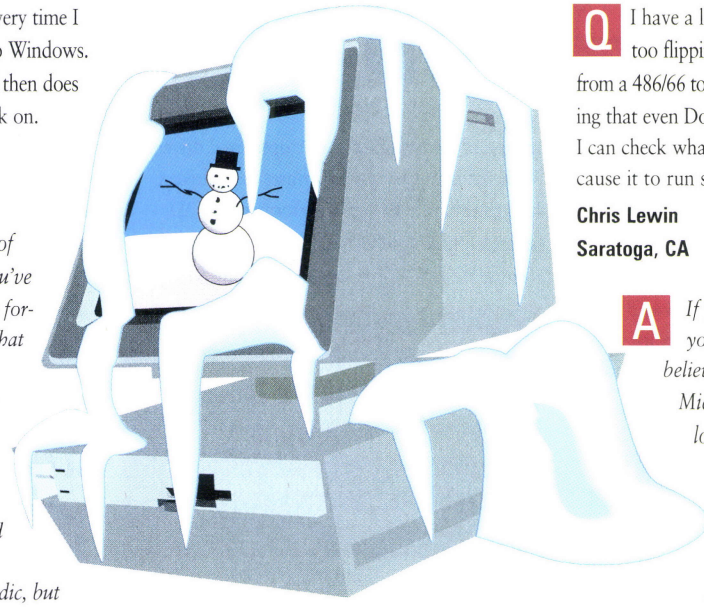
Start-up woes, boot disks and memory, and how to speed up an upgrade.

By Patrick Marshall

A Cold Day in Hell

Q My computer keeps locking up! Every time I start it, it freezes, so I can't get into Windows. It only works after about two hours, and then does the same thing when I turn it off and back on.

David Keener
Cypress, CA



A *If I could troubleshoot this kind of problem with the information you've given me, I'd quit this job and make my fortune on the Psychic Friends Network. That said, I'll hazard a guess. When a system locks up before even getting started, the problem is usually one involving memory used by one of the devices attached to the computer. It's usually the graphics adaptor, but it might also be the hard drive or some other device.*

It's rare that such problems are sporadic, but I've seen it, and the culprit is generally an interrupt, or IRQ. So how to fix the problem? The more certain way is to write down all the settings of all your devices—what memory addresses, IRQs, and DMA settings they're using—and then make certain that none of them are in conflict. Also, if your system is using expanded memory, use the emmexclude *command in your* config.sys *file to exclude the memory range used by your video card from being used for expanded memory. (The syntax for this command can be found in your DOS manual, and the memory range you'll want to exclude is A000-EFFF.)*

Alternatively, if you're in a trial-and-error mood, you can turn to a utility such as Norton Utilities, Microsoft's MSD or, within Windows 95, the Device Manager to find open memory addresses and interrupts. Then change the settings of your devices one by one to match open settings.

Finally, your best shot is to find a techie friend to take a hands-on look at your configuration.

Boot Disks? Why?

Q Why do so many of my games require boot disks to run even though I meet or surpass the minimum requirements? They say I need to free up more conventional memory. Could you explain what is so important about the 640K of conventional memory when I have an additional 8MB of RAM?

A. Rossi
Montreal, Canada

A *First, a little background. When Intel designed the first generation of PC microprocessors—the 8088 and 8086 chips—they were built to address 1MB (1024K) of RAM, which seemed like a lot of memory at the time. Of that 1MB, DOS reserved 384K of high memory for system usage, which left 640K of conventional memory for your applications, including RAM-resident drivers and programs.*

As programs grew larger, however, that 640K limitation soon became too confining, and specifications were developed for addressing additional extended or expanded memory. Applications and drivers written to take advantage of that extended memory could at least partially evade the 640K limit, though they still required at least a portion of the 640K of conventional memory.

Unfortunately, many DOS-based games still require a relatively large amount of free conventional memory—as much as 512K or more. That's hard to come by if you've loaded network drivers, CD-ROM drivers, mouse drivers, and a bunch of other things that require at least some conventional memory. (If you want to take a look at what your system is currently loading into memory, go to the DOS prompt and type MEM /C /P.)

In any event, the boot disks are there so that you can boot your computer with only those drivers and configuration settings required to run the game.

Too Slow for Doom

Q I have a little problem with my computer: it's too flippin' slow! My dad says we upgraded it from a 486/66 to a Pentium 75, but I doubt it considering that even Doom II runs slowly. Is there any way I can check what I have in my system? Can memory cause it to run slowly? I have 12MB of RAM.

Chris Lewin
Saratoga, CA

A *If you don't trust your dad, who can you trust? Well, for starters, don't believe the MSD utility that comes with Microsoft Windows. It can tell you a lot about your system, including the amount of RAM and the status of ports, but it has an irritating tendency to report Pentium chips as 486 processors. Fortunately, there are a number of utilities on the market that are more reliable in reporting processor types and speeds. The best-known is Symantec's Norton Utilities. The program lists for $179, and includes a collection of diagnostic tools as well as data recovery and other utilities. You can reach Symantec at 800-441-7234.*

Also, if you have the Windows 95 Systems utility (accessed through the Control Panel), it will tell you what kind of processor you're running, though not its speed.

But don't look just to the processor. Moving from a 486/66 to a Pentium 75 is not by itself going to improve performance much for many operations. You'll get more improvement by taking your RAM up to 16MB and getting a good graphics accelerator with fast video RAM.

The slope is, as the saying goes, slippery. As you upgrade one part of your system, another part becomes the bottleneck holding back faster performance. You can end up spending more than if you had simply bought a new computer.

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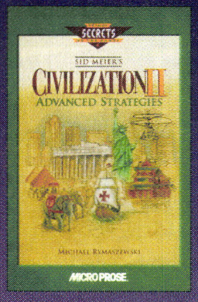
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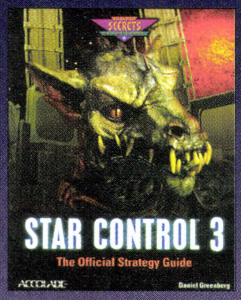
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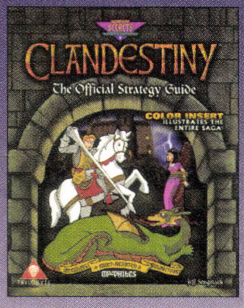


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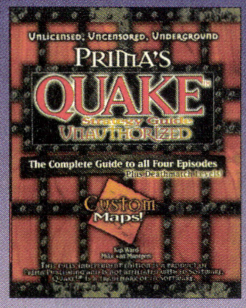
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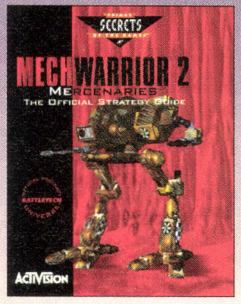
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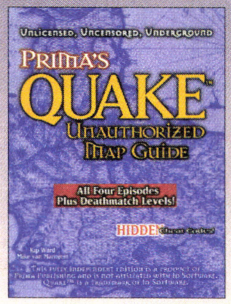
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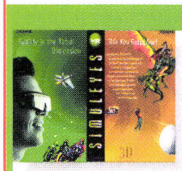
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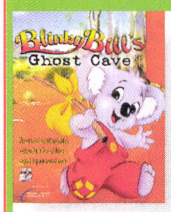
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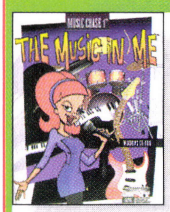
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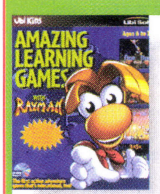
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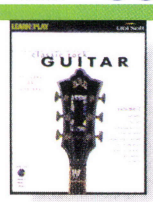
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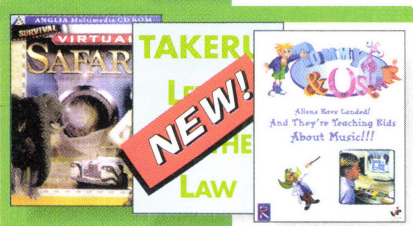


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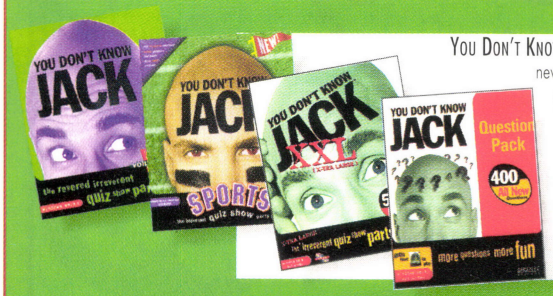


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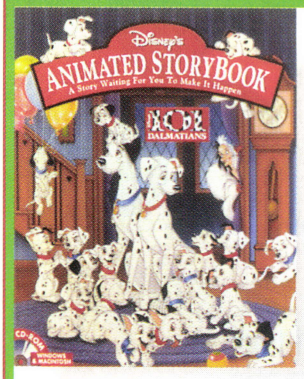
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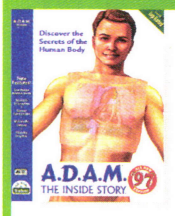
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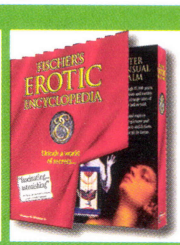
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FACE-OFF

Real-Time vs. Turn-Based Strategy

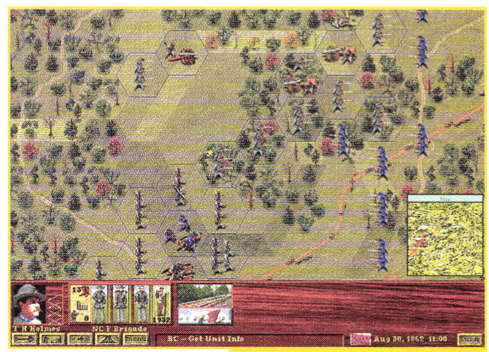
Rob Smith *Daniel Morris*

Two of *PC Games*' fiercest strategy buffs go toe-to-toe to resolve the burning question in strategy gaming today: Is turn-based warfare going the way of the dinosaurs? Should it be consigned to the scrap heap of history, like some mothballed PT boat? Or is there still some ammo left in the classic turn-based computer wargame?

Reviews editor Rob Smith is a champion of the real-time revolution, as shown in his November feature on upcoming real-time strategy games. For him, it's only a war if you can hear the bullets whistling.

Assistant editor Daniel Morris is a frequent victim of multiplayer humiliation over the office LAN, but he can win Gettysburg for the South or capture Moscow for the Nazis if he's got a few turns with which to do it.

The firing commences, with Rob's rantings in bold type and Dan's in the classy *italics*...



Civil War General



Z

Smith here. A natural born killer if ever there was one.

Okay, tough guy. What's the big deal about real-time strategy?

Putting yourself in the position of officers, NCOs, and infantry on the ground, feeling the anticipation of a battle, witnessing first-hand the successes or failures of your decisions–that's what real-time strategy is about. It's something that turn-based play simply can't re-create.

The main adrenaline rush in real-time gaming is in scrambling all over hell with your mouse trying to plug all the leaking holes in your troops' AI. When you've got the luxury of a turn to direct your forces, you can accurately re-create the individual, personal dynamics of combat without having to worry about the fact that your eyes and mouse can only be in one place at one time.

But that's the excitement of battle! While I'm not saying that turn-based games are necessarily dull, you always play an isolated role in the events. You're just some gin-swilling general sending troops over the top without any thought or vision of the slaughter ahead.

A frustration anxiety attack because you can't possibly direct the actions of all your troops is NOT the same as "the excitement of battle." In real-time strategy games, victory goes to the faster guy. There's just no other way to put it. You can make all kinds of boneheaded decisions and still prevail just because you're nimble with the mouse.

It's called nerve, speed, and the ability to think and react on the fly. True, speed is important, moving the mouse across the battlefield to get units mobilized. But behind the speed is the requirement for the same tactical awareness. A bad decision will still be a bad decision if things don't work out, whether you take 10 seconds or 30 minutes to decide. Real-time is also more encompassing in scope of responsibility. In turn-based games spread over wide-scale areas, you play as the general–and just the general. Real-time lets you be the general, the majors, the sergeants, and the grunts, all at the same time. The requirements on the part of the player are very different–speed and quick-wittedness are vital, but there's no loss of strategic planning.

That's just not true. Games like Jagged Alliance or X-COM gave us brilliant simulations of tactical, squad-level combat. They're much more enjoyable than their real-time counterparts because you still control the actions and reactions of individuals, but you get to give each soldier his own realistically separate time to operate smartly and soundly. Gamers understand that turn-based action is a piece-by-piece re-creation of a real-time event, broken apart into controllable units. Ironically, turn-based tactical combat is a far more realistic and responsive simulation of real-time military engagements than true real-time games are.

I get the last word. Real-time offers far more in terms of action, excitement, and–most importantly–involvement in missions and campaigns than the turn-based model could ever allow. It can't be beat.

Whatever. As long as the world knows that you wouldn't dare sit across the other end of a modem connection from me with an SSI game between us.

I said I get the last word.

Fine.

Rob Smith's favorite strategy games include Command & Conquer, Warcraft II, and Syndicate Wars. He prides himself on his nerve, speed, and articulate trash talk during network games.

Daniel Morris' favorite strategy games include Civilization II, Allied General, and X-COM: UFO Defense. He went easy on Rob because Rob is technically his boss, and could issue a real-time command to have him sent back to the mailroom he came from.

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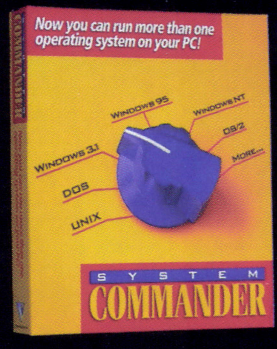
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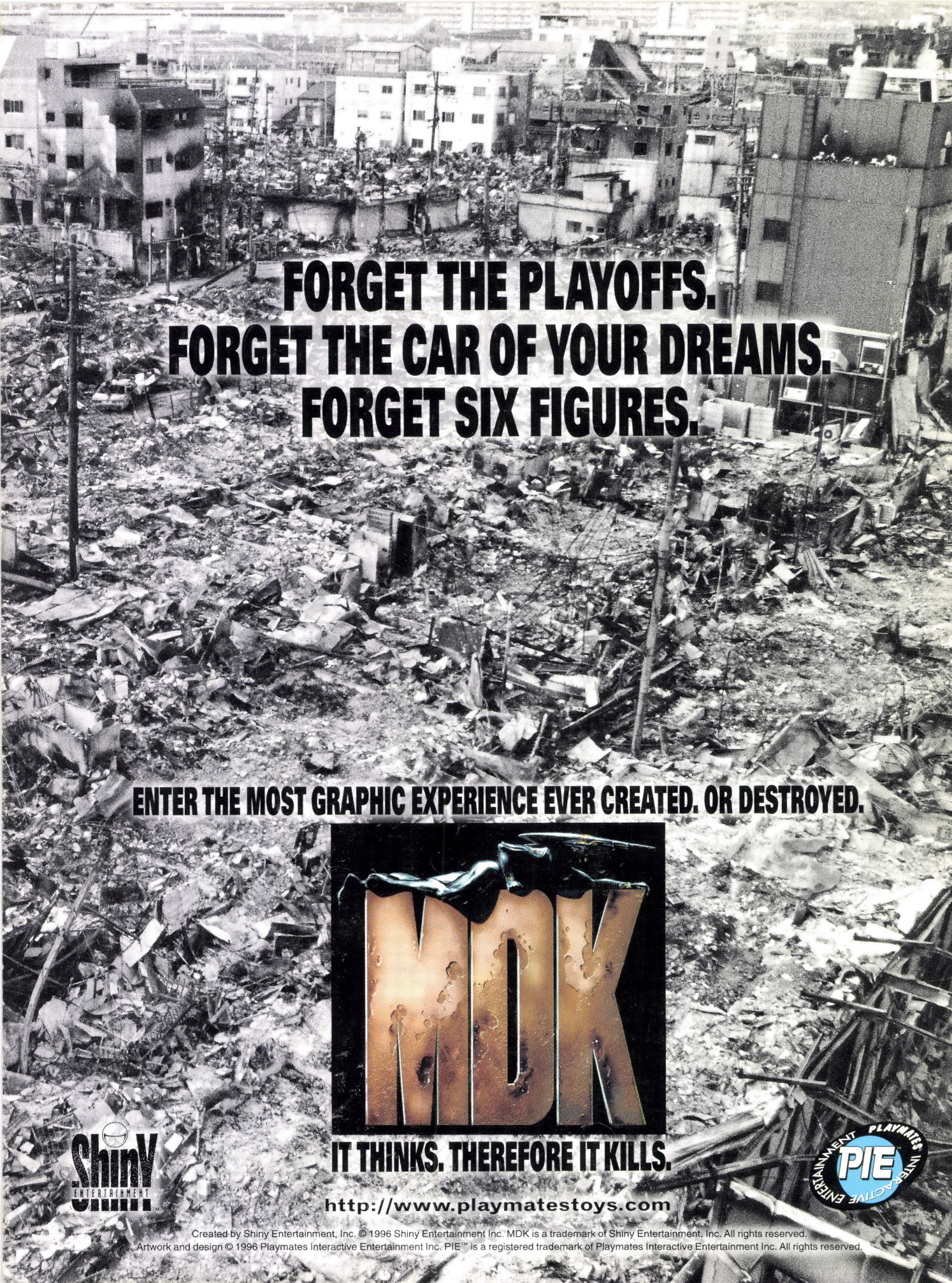
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